The New Criterion

November 1993

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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"Lying for the Truth: Münzenberg & the Comintern" is excerpted from *Double Lives: Spies and Writers in the Secret Soviet War of Ideas Against the West* by Stephen Koch, to be published in January 1994 by The Free Press. © 1993 by Stephen Koch. Printed by permission of The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. November 1993, Volume 12, Number 3. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Copyright © 1993 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date.

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Kate Shanley, 799 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. (212) 477-4905. Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan/Laurie Barton, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard with the Flexicon Composer from E-Type Design Associates, and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

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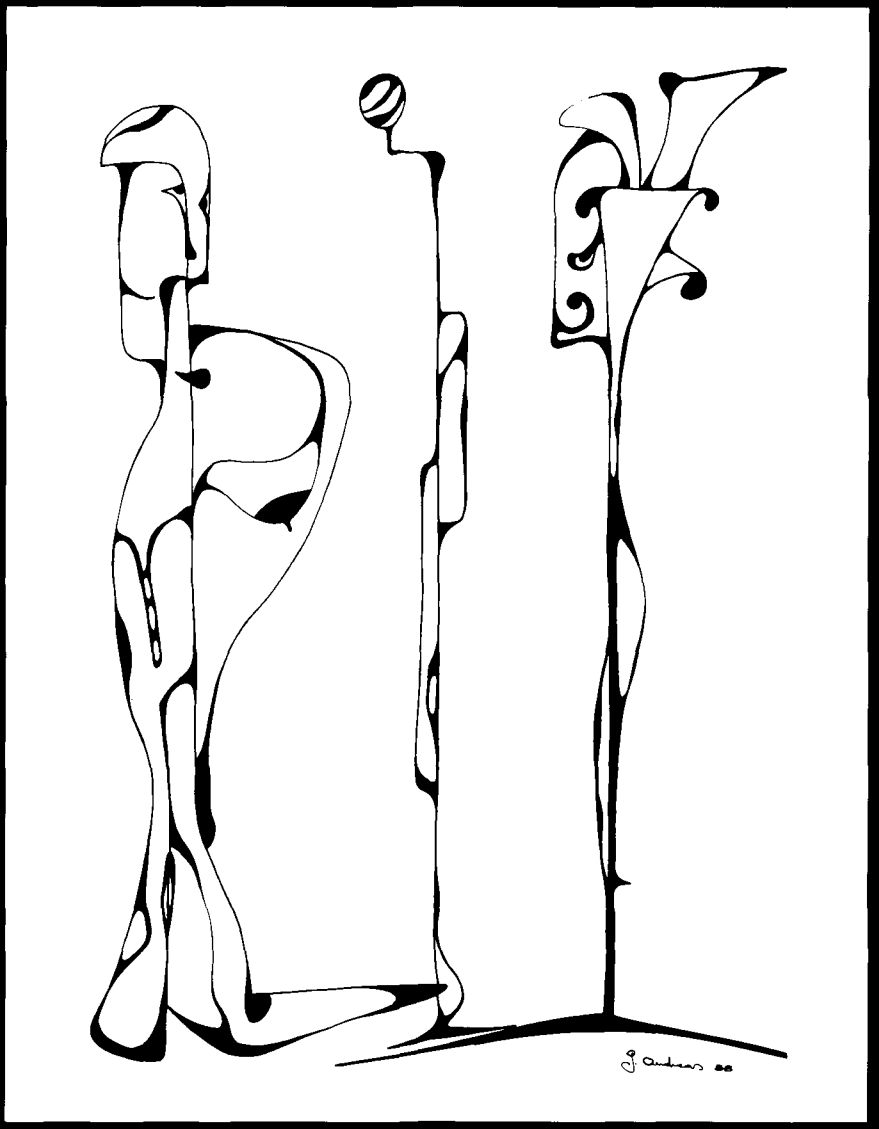

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Notes & Comments: November 1993

The specialist & the amateur

When is it bad to be good? Ask *The New York Times Book Review*. We're thinking particularly of the recent performance there by George Levine, Kenneth Burke Professor of English Literature at Rutgers University. In the issue for September 19, Professor Levine treated readers of the *Times* to a review of Joseph Epstein's latest collection of essays, *Pertinent Players* (Norton). Since many of the essays in that volume first appeared in *The New Criterion*, we naturally were curious to see what Professor Levine had to say about them. He seemed to begin on a promising note: Mr. Epstein, we read, "attempts to exhibit" all manner of literary virtue: "common sense, aphoristic wit, precision of language, moderation, learning, integrity." That "attempts" is a snide nugget, to be sure, but we thought that Professor Levine was so accurate in his inventory of Mr. Epstein's literary merits that we were prepared to overlook a bit of hauteur.

But he, clearly, was not. And the result is a review that borders on the fantastic. More than anything, Professor Levine wants us to know that Joseph Epstein isn't really as sophisticated as his many fans had thought —not, at any rate, as sophisticated as he, the Kenneth Burke Professor of English at Rutgers University, lays claim to being. Professor Levine laments that Mr. Epstein locates his audience "somewhere at the level of bright English majors." Presumably, Professor Levine locates *his* audience somewhere at the level of the graduate seminar. Which is better? Take a look at the kind of work emanating from the trendy precincts of academia lately—all those dour, reader-proof exercises in subsidized radical chic—and decide which you'd prefer. Ourselves, we'll take the bright English majors for whom Professor Levine has such contempt.

So many things about Mr. Epstein irritate the Kenneth Burke Professor of English. For one thing, Mr. Epstein refuses to be fashionable: he is, poor fellow, "aggressively not with it." How can he presume to have anything to say if he is not riding on the latest academic bandwagon? And never mind that Mr. Epstein writes with the "ease of a Victorian belletrist" and "the interpretive authority of a New Critic." Although Professor Levine is (was?) himself a Victorianist, those labels are for him terms of abuse. (It is curious, though, that Professor Levine should gloss "New Critic" with the observation that Mr. Epstein's essays specialize in "linking the quality of each subject's writing to the life and thus making his essays unstrenuously interpretive and gossipy." Wasn't it a hallmark of the New Critics to eschew the emphasis on biography in order to concentrate on the work?)

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Yes, Mr. Epstein writes clearly and directly. But for Professor Levine, his "quasi-Orwellian insistence on directness and integrity seems disingenuous." Why? Well, Professor Levine doesn't really say. Again, it's a matter of fashion, partly—neither directness nor integrity is much prized in the chic academic purlieus that Professor Levine inhabits—but it is also a matter of politics. According to Professor Levine, Mr. Epstein is caught in the 1950s—by definition a bad thing—and therefore he "remains a cold warrior who has absorbed nothing of contemporary critical self-consciousness about the standpoint from which judgments are made." Could it be—is it possible?—that Mr. Epstein knows quite enough about "contemporary critical self-consciousness," thank you, but that he has neglected to "absorb" it because he recognizes it as a threat to one's intellectual and literary health—as, in fact, polysyllabic hogwash?

Professor Levine doesn't offer an opinion about this. But his talk about "belletrism" (and it comes up again in his review) reminds us that he was one of several authors of "Speaking for the Humanities," a widely circulated pamphlet on the state of the humanities that the American Council of Learned Societies published in 1989. Intended as a damning response to such critics of the academy as William Bennett and Allan Bloom, the pamphlet takes aim at all those who believe that there is something rotten in the American academy today and who persist in believing that literature has something to say to the common man. "It is," we read in that pamphlet,

> precisely because teachers of the humanities take their subject seriously that they become specialists, allow themselves to be professionals rather than amateurs—belle lettrists who unselfconsciously sustain traditional hierarchies, traditional social and cultural exclusions, assuming that their audience is both universal and homogeneous.

Note the arrogance: no non-specialists need apply, for they—unlike such super-intelligent critics as Professor Levine—are blinded by unexamined preconceptions and prejudices. How could anyone who hasn't been through the cleansing purgatory of graduate school really understand anything about the humanities? The true nature of this attitude was summed up neatly by the English writer John Gross. In a scathing criticism of "Speaking for the Humanities," Mr. Gross noted that what the authors are really calling for is a "closed shop" in which literature is available for comment only to the professors and their coteries. Maybe this would be OK if our academic specialists in the humanities were producing anything worth reading. Are they? Buy and read a few recent volumes and you tell us. We think you'll go running for writers like Mr. Epstein—writers who like literature, who know what they like and why, and who want you to like it, too.

Indeed, as one makes one's way through this extraordinary review, it gradually becomes clear that what Professor Levine finds completely unacceptable is . . . good writing: writing that is thoughtful, carefully honed, judiciously circumspect. The real problem with Mr. Epstein's essays, Professor Levine confides, is that "they everywhere separate the imaginative and honorable wheat from the chaff of excess and pretension. Truth and clarity are good; jargon and utopianism are hateful." It is well to pause over that. We think it is intended to be ironical—after all, the Kenneth Burke Professor of English at Rutgers can hardly be thought to believe that truth and clarity are good, jargon and utopianism bad. And it is worth noting, too, that *The New York Times Book Review*, which for many years now has rather specialized in "dumbing down" its reviews in order to reach a mass audience, should resort to someone like Professor Levine when for once it gets around to reviewing a graceful writer who makes the literary tradition come alive for non-academics.

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Professor Levine ends by confessing that reading Mr. Epstein made him long for "some terrible, jargon-laden prose that might at least recognize, in its own perverse and often unnecessary difficulty, that the world is not so easily registered by the conventions of Victorian belletrism." (There's that terrible "Victorian belletrism" again!) But Professor Levine shouldn't worry. This is one case in which we feel safe predicting that he will get his wish. It is difficult not feeling that it is, after all, only his due.

Speech or action?

Late in September, we got yet another glimpse of what marvelous things are happening on American campuses. In an article called "Free Speech on Campus? It's a Matter of Debate," *The New York Times* reported on the latest tactic in the strategy of politically correct intimidation. This time the PC police are using theft as a means of enforcing their brand of conformity. At a number of campuses across the country, student activists have taken to trespassing on college property to abscond with copies of conservative student newspapers—newspapers whose only offense is to espouse a politics with which the activists disagree. Some of these incidents—at the University of Pennsylvania, for instance—have made national headlines. At Penn—the former home, we remind readers, of Sheldon Hackney, now Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities—several black students broke into various university buildings and stole nearly the entire press run of one issue of *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. The student perpetrators were duly apprehended. But a university committee set up to review the offense decided that they were engaged in a form of "protest activity" and so took no action against them. (A campus policeman, however, was reassigned to desk duty because he had displayed insufficient sensitivity.)

Contrast this with the proliferation of speech codes and sexual-harassment legislation on college campuses. At many institutions, one can be fined, suspended, or sent to "consciousness-raising" classes simply for expressing opinions or making comments that contradict the reigning orthodoxy mandates. One thinks, to take just one example, of the college where "mis-directed laughter" is a punishable offense. Thus it is that the robust exercise of free speech is viewed as a form of discriminatory *action*, and hence is open to sanction.

So here's the formula: In the academy, conservative speech is a form of action that is liable to disciplinary review, but radical action—breaking into college property, for example, or even theft—is to be regarded as a protected form of speech. In other words, all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.

Alger Hiss, trusted accomplice

Remember the wild enthusiasm with which the Left greeted a Russian general's announcement last year that he could find no evidence in KGB files that Alger Hiss had spied for the Soviet Union? The general's subsequent protestation that the archives he consulted were incomplete made nary a dent in the campaign to vindicate Mr. Hiss. It will be amusing to see what contortions his supporters go into now that Maria Schmidt, a Hungarian historian, has made documents available detailing Mr. Hiss's connection with Noel Field, an American double agent who sought asylum behind the Iron Curtain in 1949. As the biographer Sam Tanenhaus noted in a recent op-ed piece for *The New York Times*, "Mr. Field states categorically that one of his most trusted accomplices in the Soviet underground was Alger Hiss." To Mr. Tanenhaus, it looks like the "smoking gun" that will finally explode the myth of Alger Hiss's innocence. We think he is correct. But we suspect that first there will be a thundercloud of smoke belching forth as the Left tries to obscure this embarrassing revelation. We suggest you ready your gas mask.

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Reflections on Miró

by Hilton Kramer

For me a form is never something abstract; it is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else. For me painting is never form for form's sake.
—Joan Miró, in 1948

Miró always insisted that he was not an abstract painter, and in much of his work he wasn't, of course. He said of his early work, the paintings he created while he was still living in Barcelona, that he was then "an extreme realist," and though his paintings of that period are not exactly "realist" in our sense of the term, we know what he meant by it. They are paintings governed by the conventions of direct observation and precise depiction. Yet so large an element of fantasy and invention enters into their realization that they hardly qualify as realism at all. We are thus reminded that every statement by Miró about his own work—including his categorical assertion that "For me a form is never something abstract"—is an argument and a hedge designed to disarm his critics and contemporaries. Like his art, Miró's remarks about his work often abound in paradox and ambiguity. They are not invariably to be taken as flat statements of fact.

It was James Johnson Sweeney who once compared Miró's "realist" period to the "naïve" paintings of Henri Rousseau, and allowing for all the obvious differences between these two wonderful artists, it remains a telling comparison. We understand a masterpiece like *The Farm* (1921-22), for example, a lot better when we see it in relation to Rousseau's fantasy landscapes. *The Farm*, too, is an affectionate and painstaking evocation of a beloved paradise. "Even that painting, which I made in Paris to keep me in touch with Montroig," Miró recalled years later, "was so dependent on reality I used to go out to the Bois de Boulogne to pick twigs and leaves to use as models for the plants and foliage in the foreground." Which sounds a lot like the way Rousseau worked on his paintings. Yet Miró acknowledged that the formal structure of the painting "had forced me . . . to sacrifice reality to some degree in *The Farm*." This masterly picture is, in any case, more a dream of Montroig than a realistic depiction of it. It is, as Miró said, "Montroig in Paris," which meant, among much else, that its structure owed a lot to Cubism.

"I learned the structure of a picture from Cubism," Miró said, and the dreamlike specificity of detail in *The Farm* achieves a marvelous clarity and rigor precisely because of the way everything in it is held in tight suspension by "the discipline of Cubism," as he called it. The same can be said of the monumental *Still Life with Rabbit* (1920-21), painted just prior to *The Farm*. These are anything but naïve paintings, however much they may cultivate the paradoxical effects of a willed modernist naïveté in their stylistic details.

Too much can be made of Miró's naïveté. He was an artist with a highly developed

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consciousness of his moment in history. In her text for the huge catalogue that accompanies the Miró retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art this fall,[1] Carolyn Lanchner straightaway strikes exactly the right note by quoting from a letter that the artist wrote to a friend in July 1922 just after the completion of *The Farm*. "I am sure that we, the young people who had the good fortune to be born after Picasso . . . have a goal of capital importance," Miró wrote. "I am sure that we are living in a wonderful time, a blessed time that will bear fruit. This is a period that demands a great sense of individual responsibility."

From the perspective of our own day, with the priority that we accord to the cult of youth on the art scene, it is interesting that at the age of twenty-nine Miró still counted himself among "the young people" and spoke of his future course as one that demanded "a great sense of individual responsibility." For this was an artist already acutely aware of modernism as a tradition to be confronted and grappled with, an artist in search of a point of entry that would enable him to take his place in that tradition by significantly altering its premises and assumptions while remaining completely faithful to his own experience.

In that search, the lure of abstraction loomed for Miró, however much he denied it, as both a powerful stimulus and an abiding source of anxiety and dread. It is worth recalling that when Miró settled in the French capital in the early Twenties with the intention of joining the avant-garde, the aesthetics of abstract art did not command much of a following among the masters of the School of Paris. For the better part of a decade, abstraction had been programmatically advanced in Germany, Russia, and the Netherlands, where it remained tethered to occult doctrine, metaphysical theory, and political ideology, but in Paris this essentially "Northern" artistic development still met with a good deal of resistance. Mondrian had returned to Paris after the First World War, but he exerted no influence on the School of Paris. Neither did Kandinsky, who in the Twenties was ensconced at the Bauhaus in Germany. Matisse, Derain, Picasso, Léger, and Gris all turned their faces against abstraction. In Paris it was the moment of Neo-Classicism and other modes of modernist representation that eschewed the abstractionist option. What Mondrian called the "logical consequences" of Cubism did not yet occupy a place on the agenda of the School of Paris, which was what brought Miró to the capital of the international avant-garde.

Yet it was out of this artistic milieu, which was so hostile to the aesthetics of abstraction, that Miró emerged as one of the greatest abstract painters of the century. That he became an abstractionist despite himself and despite all of his vociferous denials, hardly matters. In art, it is results that count, and the result in Miró's case was unmistakable—even to the enemies of abstraction. By 1925, when he painted *The Birth of the World*, Miró had produced one of the masterpieces of abstract art, and it was by no means an isolated example in his work of the Twenties. His paintings of that period abound in bold assaults on the frontiers of abstraction. André Breton, himself hardly a champion of abstraction, famously described *The Birth of the World* as "the *Desmoiselles d'Avignon* of the *informel*," thus nominating Miró—correctly, I think—as the progenitor of a wholly new tradition in abstract painting, a tradition that derived from the Surrealist idea of automatism.

It is thus one of the ironies of modern art history that Surrealism, which was itself so hostile to abstraction in theory, served as a catalyst for Miró's unexpected leap into abstraction. Dada and Surrealism served Miró in many other ways as well, of course.

1 "Joan Miró," organized by Carolyn Lanchner, Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, opened at MOMA on October 17 and remains on view through January 11, 1994. A catalogue has been published by MOMA/Harry N. Abrams (484 pages, $75; $37.50 paper).

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The figure of Hans (Jean) Arp, the happiest and least cynical of all the Dada masters, looms especially large in this regard. Much in Miró's art from the Twenties onward is unimaginable in isolation from Arp's influence—a subject that is sometimes lost sight of. Arp's collages based on "the laws of chance," the vocabulary of biomorphic shapes in the painted constructions, and the morphology of "organic" form that Arp developed in his sculpture—all of these cast a spell upon Miró's imagination that retained its magic for him during the most productive years of his life. So did the insouciant radical ethos of Dada as a general aesthetic principle.

What Surrealism, as distinct from Dada, brought to Miró's art was not only the idea of automatism, with its celebrated claim of affording special access to the concealed scenarios of the unconscious mind, but also the notion of painting as a species of poetry. As a species, that is, of Surrealist poetry, with its unimpeded flow of incongruous images and fractured erotic narrative, and its dizzying feats of metaphorical association. What in Surrealist poetry is often ponderous and unsmiling, however—the labored effort to generate and sustain the iconography of the unconscious—Miró instantly transformed into a buoyant comic cosmology. It was a sign of Miró's genius that he was able to make so much, and so quickly, of his encounter with Surrealist poetry—creating, in effect, a new pictorial syntax to accommodate the scenery of his dreams and hallucinations—while resisting, at least until the Thirties, the whole *pompier* side of Surrealist painting. Prompted by the imperatives of the automatist impulse and the incitements of Surrealist poetry, Miró's "unconscious"—if we can call it that—turned out to be teaming with visual puns, ironic metaphors, affectionate memories, and erotic yearning, all more or less tethered to the folklore of his native Catalonia and always cast in a comic mode. Yet the pictorial syntax that Miró created to encompass this very personal iconography of memory and desire was highly abstract, and it is in the tension obtained by its unexpected conjunction of radical abstraction and fragmented representation that Miró's art achieved its greatest originality and eloquence.

What is so remarkable about Miró's so-called "dream" pictures of the mid- and late-Twenties is the way the volatile relation obtaining between iconographic fantasy and abstract invention remains open and alert to the dictates of imagination even as the artist plots the course of every picture with the precision of a visionary engineer. The exhibition that Carolyn Lanchner has organized at MOMA does more to illuminate this aspect of Miró's art than any other I have seen. Drawings like *The Kerosene Lamp* and *The Family* (both 1924) oblige us to revise our understanding of the role played by the automatist impulse in Miró's painting, for it is entirely absent from the drawings, which are seen to contain everything a Miró painting of the period might contain—except the *painting* of it. It is the inventive draftsman in Miró who remains the iconographer and the painter—in this period of his painting, anyway—who carries the art into a theretofore unchartered realm of abstraction.

Ms. Lanchner proves to be a reliable guide to the shifting dialectic of abstraction and representation in Miró's work in the Twenties, which is surely the period of his greatest accomplishment. She cites the judgment of Marcel Duchamp, who wrote of Miró's work in this period that the artist "held himself apart from any direct influence and showed a series of canvases in which form, submitted to strong coloring, expressed a new two-dimensional cosmogony without the least tie to abstraction." She then cites the contrary judgment of Clement Greenberg—that "with one abrupt leap . . . [Miró] arrived at the abstract." To which she adds that "between the two is located the center of Miró's genius."

> No other artist [she continues]—not even Paul Klee—managed to make representational signs and imagery function in a formally abstract context as Miró did. In this sense, neither

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> Duchamp nor Greenberg was wrong, although Miró might well have felt that Greenberg had taken the wrong tack. Miró always vehemently maintained that his art was never abstract. In an interview published in 1936, he remembered his response to an invitation to join the Abstraction-Création group: "And they ask me into their deserted house, as if the marks I put on a canvas did not correspond to a concrete representation of my mind, did not possess a profound reality, were not a part of the real itself! . . . Poetry is expressed through a plastic medium, and it speaks its own language. . . . I consider it an insult to be placed in the category of 'abstract' painters." But the fact that he felt compelled to defend himself so hotly shows the seriousness of a nearly consummated affair.

Ms. Lanchner is surely right, too, in suggesting that "Miró's exaggerated indignation at the suggestion that his art might be considered abstract had to do primarily with his will to retain the imagistic force of traditional painting." Yet against Miró's deeply felt pieties on this question there is the fact that in the Twenties he was one of the painters—one of the greatest—who emptied painting of almost everything but the experience of form and color. *The Birth of the World* is not a work that in any way retains "the imagistic force of traditional painting," and by the time we get to the untitled *Painting* of 1930, with its two large areas of red and yellow and a small spot of black on a white ground, all that is left is purest abstraction. And it was as a master of abstract painting that Miró exerted his greatest influence on the New York School—the perspective from which Clement Greenberg wrote his monograph on Miró in 1948.

For myself, the interest of Miró's work tends to diminish after the "dream" paintings of the Twenties, and does not pick up again until we come to the dazzling series of *Constellations* on paper that he produced in the early years of the Second World War. (They, too, were to have an immense influence on the New York School when they were exhibited at Pierre Matisse's in 1948.) In these *Constellations* there is such a perfect synthesis of iconography and abstraction that they can no longer be distinguished as separate impulses. The poetry is *in* the abstraction. It was not an achievement that could be sustained at the same level in the postwar years when Miró tended more and more to produce larger and somewhat mannered and academicized versions of his own earlier work. And in his last years, when he took to imitating the work of the American color-field abstractionists, the most distinctive features of his genius simply vanished. The last galleries in this immense exhibition are pretty sad. It is in the early pre-Paris paintings, the great work of the Twenties, and the *Constellations* that Miró survives as a modern master. For this reason, it was a mistake to turn this retrospective into a kind of blockbuster event consisting of some four hundred works and a catalogue too heavy to carry home, for we now know that Miró cannot sustain an exhibition on this scale, and it diminishes his real achievement to pretend otherwise.

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What is sacred? Ronald Dworkin & his answers

by Jenny Teichman

According to the publisher's blurb, *Life's Dominion*,[1] Ronald Dworkin's defense of abortion and euthanasia, is "lucid, imaginative . . . and brilliantly original." In the "advance praise" printed on the dust jacket the president of the American Civil Liberties Union, Nadine Strossen, describes the work as careful, clear, path-breaking, and stunningly insightful, Susan Sontag says it is fresh, agile, and improving, and Joan Didion calls it a miracle. These good opinions, and Dworkin's international renown—he is the author of three other books, a professor of law at New York University, and University Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford—will probably ensure a fairly wide readership. All the more important, then, that the book should receive at least one detailed critical assessment as well as the me-too mega-hype to be expected in such cases.

Life's Dominion is made up of eight chapters: three on abortion, three on constitutional questions, and two on euthanasia. I will have most to say about the first two topics.

Where to begin? Let's begin with Aristotle, who said "I love Plato, but I love truth more." In an unrecorded aside he added "what is more, I admire ingenious ideas, but not as much as I admire clarity and consistency and logic." Dworkin's reasoning is very ingenious: it is also smudgy.

The main argument runs as follows:

1. Conservatives, e.g. Catholics, and liberals, e.g. feminists, believe their disagreement about abortion has to do with rights; thus conservatives assert, and liberals deny, that the fetus has a right to life. According to Dworkin both sides are mistaken about their own beliefs. Neither liberals nor conservatives really think that fetuses have rights. But both sides, whether they know it or not, believe human life, including fetal life, is sacred. Liberals and conservatives all know deep down that the disagreement is really about *degrees of sanctity*.
2. A fetus cannot have rights because it is not a person. It is not a constitutional person, it is not a person in a practical sense, and it is not a person in a philosophical sense. All human life, however, is sacred. The fetus represents human life in general from the moment of conception, and becomes an individual human being (or beings) at fourteen days. After fourteen days the genetic code of the embryo or embryos is fixed, and twinning will have already occurred if it is going to occur.
3. Human life is sacred because it is intrinsically valuable. The notion of intrinsic value makes sense because most people, whether they know it or not, actually believe in it.

1 *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom*, by Ronald Dworkin; Knopf, 273 pages, $23.

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4. Ethical beliefs about the intrinsic value of life are "cosmic" and therefore essentially religious in character. Even secular non-theistic beliefs about the sanctity of life are cosmic, and thus also religious in a sense.
5. The U.S. Constitution is a set of abstract ethical principles that other democracies recognize as correct. Many nations envy the U.S.A. its Bill of Rights and its noble principles.
6. The U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief and a right to privacy in religious matters.

From these six premises Dworkin deduces that it is morally wrong for governments to ban abortion; in the case of America, it is also legally invalid. Any ban in America would be a violation of the constitutional right to freedom and privacy in all matters concerned with religion. What is more, if an American state were to allocate more money to maternity hospitals than to abortion clinics, that too would violate the right to freedom in religion.

I think this argument looks rather fishy even at first glance. Closer examination reveals that some of the premises are unproven, some rest on false assumptions, and some are unclear.

PREMISE 1. The assertion that conservatives and liberals don't genuinely believe what they think they believe is not proven. Worse, the assertion undermines one of Dworkin's favorite modes of inference, the type of inference that assumes that what most people think is likely to be true. Furthermore, belief in rights and belief in sanctity are not incompatible. A typical Catholic conservative might well claim *both* that the fetus has rights *and* that human life is sacred. Finally, the question as to whether the belief that life is *not* sacred should count as "cosmic" is repeatedly fudged.

PREMISE 2 invokes the notions of *rights* and *personhood*. Dworkin has nothing to say about rights as such, that is, he offers no definition or explanation of the concept. On the other hand, there are some unstated assumptions about rights underpinning his general approach to moral philosophy: I will discuss these assumptions later in this essay.

Dworkin claims, no doubt correctly, that at present the fetus is not regarded as a constitutional person, but fairly notes that two hundered years ago slaves were not regarded as constitutional persons either. Slaves were made into constitutional persons, as it were, by the Thirteenth Amendment. Could fetuses similarly be made into constitutional persons? Dworkin replies: Not if that would interfere with an adult's constitutionally protected rights.

Next Dworkin explains that he will adopt a "practical" rather than a "philosophical" definition of personhood. In spite of this disclaimer he actually has a philosophical model in mind throughout, namely the anti-humanist account given by such authors as Michael Tooley and Peter Singer. Indeed on page 245 he naïvely recommends Tooley as a good source for "the" philosophical sense of personhood. Well, there isn't any such thing as "the" philosophical sense of personhood, any more than there is such a thing as "the" philosophical sense of idea, or of matter, or of free will. Even if there were it would still be necessary to ask whether persons, as defined by philosophers, are the only beings that can have rights. Be that as it may, our author holds that rights depend on personhood and that personhood depends, not on humanity *per se*, nor on the potentialities of the embryo, but rather on current possession of some degree of sentience. In support of this view he sets out to rebut a one-step argument involving future potentiality. The argument runs as follows:

> It is in the interests of a human adult *now* that he or she was not aborted in the past;
>
> Therefore when he/she was a fetus it was in his/her interest not to be aborted *then*.

Dworkin says the inference is fallacious, adding "and we will have to take care to see why." His "reason why" consists of three analogies:

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1. It is in our interest now that the earth did not explode before human life appeared, but it wasn't in our interests then because we didn't exist then.
2. It is in Dworkin's interests now that his father did not leave home on the day before he begat Ronald, but it wasn't in Ronald's interests then because he didn't exist then.
3. Frankenstein made his monster out of a heap of separate limbs and organs. Before the heap was put together its interests could not be harmed because it did not exist *qua* monster, only *qua* bits and pieces—rather in the way that the egg and the sperm exist only as separate bits of matter before they meet each other.

But wait: the three analogies are unsatisfactory. The fetus *does* exist. The conceptus is *not* unconceived. In the fetus the egg and sperm *have* come together. Dworkin acknowledges these differences but adds "*the existence of the fetus makes no difference to the logical point*" (my italics). It is not at all clear what Dworkin thinks the logical point is. Perhaps it is this: If a being has some feature now it does not follow that it had that same feature in the past. Why not? Because the being might not even have existed in the past. However *that* logical point does not apply to beings that *did* exist in the past. This risible effort is the book's sole original contribution to the question as to whether a fetus can have rights and interests. Elsewhere the author simply asserts that "the idea that a fetus can have rights and interests is scarcely comprehensible," "almost incomprehensible," and "makes no sense."

It is true that having a feature now does not of itself necessarily entail possession of that feature in the past. It all depends on what kind of feature we are talking about. Birds have beaks but eggs do not. However, rights are not like beaks; they are not things. We need to consider whether rights are ever ascribed to beings on the basis of their potentialities. And the answer is Yes. Rights and interests do not invariably depend on the actual, on the here and the now; their existence sometimes relates to times other than the present. Let us label this characteristic *diachronicity*. Dworkin himself believes that rights and interests are diachronic. Or rather, he sometimes thinks they are and he sometimes thinks the opposite. In the earlier parts of the book he says that fetuses have no rights and interests because they lack the needed mental and sensory capacities. So he thinks rights and interests are *not* diachronic. In the chapters on euthanasia he says that adults in permanent coma have rights and interests because of things they said and did in the past. So he thinks rights and interests *are* diachronic. He goes on to say that people suffering from Alzheimer's disease have no present autonomy, and hence no genuine interests. So he thinks interests are *not* diachronic . . .

There are two ways in which rights can connect with potentiality. First, a being can have rights now in virtue of its future states. Second, a being that lacks a particular right *now*, but will have it in the future, can have that future right violated *now*. How do we know these things? We know them from examples. Interestingly enough, one type of example comes from the law.

Suppose a dying man wills his fortune to his infant daughter, stipulating that the money be held in trust until she goes to university. The infant has no interest, need, or right to pay tuition fees now; nevertheless, the money does belong to her now. If her trustees were to claim that she does not have a current genuine property right, that the cash is for example in reality theirs, the courts would sooner or later show them to be in error. Her current property right does not depend on a current ability to absorb college-level education, it depends on her future potential. A man could not make a similar will in favor of his cat because a cat has no college potential. I don't know how it is the U.S.A., but in other legal systems you can will your money to an unborn child, i.e., to a fetus, and after your death the property right will attach to the beneficiary, just as in the case above. In short, the rights relating to inheritance are diachronic.

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The second kind of relation between rights and the future is adumbrated by the philosopher Phillip Montague via the following example. Suppose someone discovers a substance that, if applied to the skin of a human male, painlessly causes him to become sterile. Suppose the liquid acts by delayed effect. Suppose now that the liquid is applied to the skin of a baby boy who when he grows up turns out to be infertile. We assume that adults have a right to procreate. We know that the baby has no current right or interest in reproducing himself. The example shows that a current action can violate a future right. In short, the violation of rights can be diachronic.

PREMISE 3. The first sections of Chapter 3 ("What Is Sacred?") are the core of the book. They have to do with intrinsic value, a topic important in itself and central to Dworkin's argument. The subsequent sections of the same chapter, beginning with the aptly named "Metric of Disrespect," explain why he thinks it is OK to destroy sacred human fetal life.

Dworkin says that "most of us" honor certain things—e.g. experience, art, the natural world—as intrinsically valuable, i.e., for their own sakes and not merely because they serve desires. Individual human lives have intrinsic value because each life is the product of two "traditions." "Tradition" is the carelessly chosen word that our author uses to refer not only to the educative powers of the human race but also to the creativity of God or Nature. He writes that

> the life of a human organism commands respect and protection . . . because of the complex creative investment it represents and . . . our wonder at the divine or evolutionary processes that produce new lives and . . . at the processes of nation and community and language through which human beings will come to absorb hundreds of generations of culture and forms of life and values. . . .

This is a beautiful credo that, as it turns out, has nothing to do with the protection of fetal life. For Dworkin goes on to insist that sanctity, respect, and protection have to give way to the rights of adults. He says that majority legal (Supreme Court) opinion correctly allows that women have a right to procreative freedom, which according to him is religious in character and moreover must include the right to abortion.

In philosophy Dworkin is very much a majoritarian. He repeatedly implies that this or that proposition must be true because "most people" would agree with it. Conversely he attacks opposition opinions by saying that "very few people" hold them; for example on page 112 he condemns a possible conservative view as "odd and unpopular." Now, appealing to public opinion is not a good way to settle difficult philosophical questions, not least because Joe Public has little time or inclination to mull over abstract problems and, when asked what he thinks, e.g. by Gallup, simply answers off the top of his head. In other words, there is often no such thing as a public opinion about tricky issues. The polls cited by Dworkin himself in Chapter 1 show that what "most people" supposedly think about ethical questions is slipshod and self-contradictory.

In Chapter 3 Dworkin switches, temporarily, from "most people" to the Oxford Metaphysical We, originally made famous in the mantra "we would say" and used more recently in such expressions as "we would be troubled," "we would be appalled," and "we would feel regret." However, the meaning and intention of the OMW is exactly the same as that of "most people." Oxford philosophers repudiate with indignation the suggestion that the OMW is a pronoun. It does not mean "I and my friends." In support of his case that intrinsic value makes sense Dworkin uses the OMW no fewer than fifty-eight times in the first twelve pages of Chapter 3 (after which I stopped counting).

To my mind the concept of intrinsic value makes sense, and would still make sense even if "we" did not think so. I agree too that human life is sacred. If human life isn't sacred then nothing is—not even liberty, or

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equality, or the pursuit of happiness. Dworkin does not succeed in explicating the relationship between the intrinsically valuable and the sacred. Sometimes he treats them as equivalent, sometimes not. He ignores the rather obvious idea that sacred things are marked off from other intrinsically valuable items, for example gustatory pleasures, by being higher, or more important. He is content to contrast the sacred with the incremental ("the more the better") —a false dichotomy, of course, since some values are both sacred and incremental. Thus religious folk believe that the more holiness, the more personal sanctity, the better.

It seems that when Dworkin set out to explore the concept of intrinsic value he did not read about what philosophers such as Bradley, or Moore, or the Husserlians have said. It seems he started from scratch, relying on his own intuitions and on the kind of unconsidered trifles that can be snapped up in seminars. The result is colorful, and impressionistic, and sounds quite high-minded, but it is also vague and self-contradictory.

As an example, just take a look at the word "inviolable." On page 73 Dworkin says he will define "the sacred" as equivalent to "the inviolable." Then, from page 84 to page 101, and at regular intervals thereafter, he tries to prove that the sacred, in the form of fetal life, is violable. One is forced to conclude that he thinks the inviolable is violable. He should never have used to word "inviolable" in the first place; he didn't need it. Having introduced the word he should not have equated it with "the sacred." Inviolability has no degrees, whereas perhaps the sacred does; after all, we have the holy, and the holier than thou, and the holy of holies, and so on. More generally, it was unwise to parachute into value theory without taking a peek at what other authors have said. The phenomenologists, for example, have a theory of value that, whether or not it is correct, is at least properly worked out and coherent. Moreover, it is mildly relativistic and so would mesh nicely with Dworkin's liberalism.

We now reach a difficult question: given that intrinsically valuable things can have unequal value, how are the inequalities estimated? I do not know the answer to this; but it is clear that Dworkin, in defining intrinsic value as "independent of what people enjoy or want or need or what is good for them," rules out the possibility of explaining those inequalities in people-dependent terms. Yet it is exactly this impossible project that Dworkin attempts, for even in this context, "most people think such-and-such" remains one of his favorite forms of argument.

Dworkin is an *adultist-cum-teenager-ist*. I'll call his attitude *adultism* for short. He says that "most people think" that life is more valuable during adolescence and maturity than at any other time. "Most people think" that killing a three-year-old child is less bad than killing a teenager. "Most people think" that the murder of Edward V and his brother "could have no parallel for horror in any act of infanticide."

One can't help wondering who these "most people" are. Perhaps Dworkin hasn't met very many people. Perhaps he has never seen a mother grieving for a dead baby. Perhaps he has never seen on TV the agonized, heart-rending appeals made by mothers to the crazy people who have stolen their infants. Perhaps he cannot extrapolate from his own example of the woman who gave up a child, not to death, but for adoption, and then mourned for four years. Perhaps he doesn't know that the most famous bit of British propaganda during World War I was the story that German soldiers were bayonetting Belgian babies. Perhaps he hasn't yet heard that Herod's name has been mud for two millennia.

Dworkin claims that the badness of a death depends on how far it frustrates "nature's investment," and "the individual's own investment," in the particular life. Little has been "invested" in a fetus, and not much in a three-year-old child. Until late middle age the rule is: the greater the investment the worse the death.

Now "nature's investment" is merely a metaphor for "stage of growth" and so begs

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the question in favor of adultism. The individual's "investment" in his/her own life is more interesting. Dworkin borrows the idea from Bernard Williams, who explains it in terms of long-term plans, projects, hopes, and future goods; in other words, all those people-dependent items that are ruled out, or ought to be ruled out, by Dworkin's definition of intrinsic value. This won't matter to Williams, who wasn't talking about intrinsic value anyway. Williams is nowadays a kind of quasi-Nietzschean; he is searching for the limits of philosophy in order to go (a *little* way) beyond good and evil. His project is therefore quite different from Dworkin's. Dworkin is trying to wedge a Williamsite reason for going beyond morality into the middle of a discussion about a specific moral problem.

PREMISE 4 appears to rest on an invalid inference, viz.: *All religious views are cosmic, therefore all cosmic beliefs are religious.*

It is also claimed that the sanctity of life is a "contestable" value. This is probably a smudgy way of saying that the negative opinion, that life is *not* sacred, is just as cosmic as the positive; for otherwise Dworkin would not be able to claim constitutional protection for it. It is possible to ask, though, why Dworkin feels so sure that the value of sanctity is more contestable than the right to procreative privacy. His answer, as it seems to me, has much to do with American law and little to do with moral philosophy.

PREMISE 5. Dworkin writes that

> the eminent French historian François Furet said that the American revolution was far more important than the French . . . because it created the form of government that much of the rest of the democratic world . . . has now begun to copy. We are envied for our innovation and increasingly imitated: in Paris and Bonn and Rome, in New Delhi and Strasbourg and Ottawa . . . people seem ready to accept the rich and high promise of government not by men and women, or even under law, but government under principle, the form of government we [Americans] created.

How is one to respond to such a speech? What will lawyers make of that distinction between the rule of law and the rule of principle? What indeed will "most people" think? One can picture wry smiles in Bonn, where the constitution, good as it is, was drawn up at the behest of conquerors (namely, the Western Allies). One can envisage the studiously enigmatic faces on the members of the Tokyo Stock Exchange. And one can imagine the irritation of the French: "Qu'est-ce que c'est le Dworkinisme? C'est l'ultra-Chauvinisme!"

PREMISE 6. Dworkin's thesis (page 172) that opting for an abortion "is the most personal, conscience-driven, and religious decision many [women] will ever make" is surely rather peculiar. The suppression of the instinctive desire for a child, plus suppression of an instinctive aversion to taking life, plus fear of surgery, do not add up to religious conviction. Indeed to claim that these anxieties are religious tends to downgrade the importance in morality of protective instincts and altruistic emotions.

That the American Constitution upholds and guarantees freedom in matters of religion is uncontroversial. That the finding in *Roe v. Wade* upholds a right to (earlyish) abortion is also clear. However abortion as such is not mentioned in the Constitution, and is not identified as a religious topic in *Roe v. Wade*. Dworkin deals with these matters as follows: he writes that "we should decide what our Constitution *says* about abortion *only after* we have decided how a just society's constitution protects individual freedom and dignity" (my italics).

This could be called the Humpty-Dumpty theory of constitutional legality, as explained in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Chapter 6.

On the dust jacket it is said that it's "clear" that the Constitution "is inescapably a set of abstract moral principles that must be reinterpreted, generation by generation."

The Constitution certainly cannot be just ignored, and if it is not to be a shackle it will indeed have to be reinterpreted from time to time. But the brute fact is that America is

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stuck with the Constitution, just as Islam is stuck with the Koran; these are sacred texts. The democratic solution might be to hold a revisionary referendum every thirty years. I suppose, though, that the Constitution itself stands in the way of such a procedure. Be that as it may, Dworkin thinks that the Supreme Court, chosen as it is by the elected representatives of the people, should carry out the job of periodic reinterpretation. On the other hand he is quite cross about some of the attitudes of judges chosen by elected representatives Reagan and Bush.

As well as the Humpty-Dumpty theory referred to above, there are suggestions in this book that liberal re-readings discover true meanings. This strikes me as superstitious. Second-guessing the intentions of the Founding Fathers is another form of the same superstition.

The relevance of the Constitution, and of the Supreme Court, to moral philosophy cannot be taken for granted. Philosophers would do well to avoid handcuffing themselves onto those or any other political or legal documents. Political and legal documents can be morally suggestive but they are not really sacred. *Life's Dominion* has convinced me that whether the U.S. Constitution can extend rights to these or those currently rightless beings is no longer a legal question, or even a political question; it is a tactical question. How much reinterpretation is possible? How elastic is the document? The answers to legal, political, or tactical questions cannot fully determine the solutions to moral problems. It is unlikely that the Constitution could ever offer life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to cows and pigs, yet vegetarianism might well be morally required of us human beings for all that.

The impact of the Bill of Rights on American philosophy is both simple and profound. Virtually all American moral philosophers of this and earlier generations focus heavily on rights. Rights are taken to be foundational in two ways. First, it is assumed that as many moral/political theses as possible ought to be reduced to theses about rights. Second, it is assumed that in a conflict between a right and some other value, the right has to, as it were, *win*. These common assumptions, which tend to reify rights, underpin the moral philosophy of *Life's Dominion*.

Instead of assuming that rights override sanctity, it is better to ask: What is a right? What do we do with the notion, how does it work? "Only persons have rights" isn't like "only birds have beaks." Rights can be recognized, i.e., extended to new classes; this is a common result of moral change and moral improvement. Animal liberationists urge us to recognize the rights of dolphins. Ecologists urge us to think about the rights of future generations. Ordinary people go around claiming all sorts of rights that nobody ever heard of before: the right to be respected, the right to vacations, to fun, to procreative privacy, etc. These facts show that talking about rights is a way of saying what you think ought to be done. There are other ways too; describing certain things as sacred is one. The idea of a right isn't separate from, or above or below, the other moral concepts. It at least makes sense to say that liberty itself is sacred, or again that a fetus has rights precisely because human life is sacred.

Dworkin suggests that government should legalize abortion yet aim to create a social atmosphere in which human life is seen as sacred. But how can government do that? Dworkin thinks abortion is a religious matter, and religious education is forbidden in American public schools. Should the states match their spending on abortion clinics with equal spending on anti-abortion counseling services? All the liberals I know seem to detest the very idea of anti-abortion counseling. The liberals I know think that showing photographs of aborted fetuses, or even unaborted fetuses, to pregnant women, or even non-pregnant women, should be banned. So much for freedom of information. I know intelligent academic liberals who seriously believe that the people who gun down abortionists are part of a nation-

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wide conspiracy orchestrated by the Catholic church. Not being a member of the Catholic church I cannot confirm or disconfirm this theory but it strikes me as unlikely. One can't tell whether Dworkin shares any or all of these typically liberal opinions, though it is worth noting that he describes the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue as a "conspiracy" and hints that it resembles the Ku Klux Klan.

The claim that "most people" regard fetal life as sacred would make sense only if abortion was a comparatively rare event. It could conceivably become rare as a result of biological causes, i.e., without being made illegal. According to the September 1993 issue of *Scientific American*, the average human sperm count in industrial countries has dropped by two-thirds since the 1960s. If some blunder at Monsanto or Dupont reduced human sperm counts to near zero, the few women who managed to get pregnant would most likely be treated as princesses; given incomes, and cars, and free tuition at Harvard, and penthouses with live-in servants and nursery nurses. There would be big social and economic rewards for reproduction.

The case is, of course, otherwise at present; economic and educational rewards for young women are tied, not inexorably but still fairly firmly, to childlessness. Abortion is not rare but common. In the U.S.A. in the late 1980s, there were around four hundred abortions for every one thousand births. To claim that "most people" think fetal life is sacred seems silly to me. If they think it is sacred, why is it so often destroyed? The statistics tell a story, and the story can be supported by much anecdotal evidence. One never reads anything about the sanctity of fetal life in the popular press: the thesis, if proposed by a liberal newspaper, would seem hypocritical. Magazines aimed at young and youngish women—e.g. *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*—are hugely in favor of abortion. They urge their readers to write letters to congressmen in support of freedom of choice. They seem to impart an ideology according to which continual sex, and abortion when pregnancy occurs, are positively expected of every female in the land. Abortion is depicted in much of the media as a useful, even essential, procedure, carried out by good patriotic Americans. The magazine *Lear's*, for instance, recently ran an article about a person who owns an abortion clinic. She was depicted as a kind-hearted grandmother, forced to buy a bulletproof vest because of her brave decision to stand up to those gunslinging Catholic conspirators. A modern version of motherhood and apple pie.

Does Dworkin himself really believe in the sanctity of fetal life? I think he does, in a way, but his belief is a Wittgensteinian Wheel. Wittgenstein's Wheel is a beautiful bit of machinery that spins ever so elegantly but is not connected with any fan-belts or cogs or levers or other wheels. It looks good but it doesn't actually do anything.

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Lying for the truth: Münzenberg & the Comintern

by Stephen Koch

A grisly discovery

On October 22, 1940, not far from a tiny French hamlet near Grenoble called Montagne, two hunters out with their dogs stumbled across something gruesome hidden in a small stand of woods. At the foot of a fine old oak sat, upright, the decomposing body of a man. The man had been dead for a long time, and he appeared to have been hanged.

What the hunters found that day would become more than a legend of their town; it would take its place among the enduring mysteries of modern politics. For this was the body of a man named Willi Münzenberg, and Willi Münzenberg had lived and died as one of the unseen powers of twentieth-century Europe. When the hunters found it, his corpse was almost entirely covered with fallen leaves. Only the vile face and the popped stare of strangulation were visible—that and the noose. The reek was awful; the body had plainly been there for months. The knotted cord around its neck seemed to have snapped, probably quite soon after he had been hanged, and when it broke, the body had apparently dropped to the base of the tree. There it had stayed, knees up, all through that summer of the French defeat, sitting oddly undetected until October began to cover it with the drift of autumn and the hunters' dogs, yelping and whining, discovered the thing.

The French villagers knew nothing about Willi Münzenberg. Münzenberg was and is not a famous name, though this man's power had given him a potent grip on the workings of fame. Since his radical youth in 1917, Willi Münzenberg had been a largely covert but major actor in the politics of the twentieth century. As a founding organizer of the Communist International and a leader in the structure of Marxist–Leninist power outside Russia, Münzenberg had played an especially influential part in the conspiracies, the maneuvers, the propaganda, the secret policies and actions that had led to this very spot: here to the fall of France; here to Hitler's war on the West; here to these woods, and this death.

October 1940 came in the bitter first autumn following the French debacle at the hands of the Nazi *Wehrmacht*. France was huddled in the morose stillness of defeat. The nation's downfall seemed complete; for the moment, the war had finished its vicious business in France and moved on.

For the dictators, all was going well. Stalin had consolidated his alliance with Hitler. The secret services of the two totalitarians were now working in a sinister collaboration that was defined by their gangster enmity, bound tight in a brotherhood of loathing. Poland had been successfully partitioned between the two; Finland was in Stalin's hands. The Nazis were driving west, and the war with its horror was focused on England.

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For this was also the autumn of the Battle of Britain. All through the months since France had fallen, the *Luftwaffe* had been carpet-bombing the cities of England. Every night the London sky was lit with tracers and fire; the air was filled with the shattering scream of bombs and the pounding of anti-aircraft defense. The prospect of an English defeat was imminent and real.

But in that French valley of the Isère River, the only gunfire being heard was the occasional muted crack of a hunter's shotgun kicking its echo across the lovely wooded countryside. And through that countryside the two men from Montagne now rushed back into town, along with their dogs, to alert the gendarmerie to what they had found.

Almost certainly, Willi Münzenberg had died in those woods five months before, on June 21, 1940. Whether he died by suicide or murder is not clear. June 21, 1940, however, was the day that the French government fell to the Nazis, and much rests on this exact coincidence of one man's death with a nation's fall. In those days of the French collapse, the countryside around Montagne had been filled with exiles and refugees streaming southward. Everyone was in flight. Yet Willi Münzenberg's flight differed from most. For one thing, it was being tracked by the secret services of at least three nations. It seems that even in those worst of times, certain important players were exceptionally interested in whether this one man, running, left France alive.

Who was Willi Münzenberg?

Why, in a collapsing world, would several governments have been so interested in this middle-aged man from Germany? Who was Willi Münzenberg?

He was a major German Communist, but he was more. Since around 1921, Lenin had empowered Münzenberg in a series of tasks, some very public, some very secret, that left this dynamic man the *de facto* director of the Soviet Union's covertly directed propaganda operations in the West.

The field of covertly directed propaganda operations is an area in the world of secret services which until now has rarely been mapped. As a result, the role of such operations in both the cultural politics of this century and its power politics has rarely been understood. Yet if one follows Münzenberg from Lenin's side to the forest where he died, his path serves as an Ariadne's thread through much in twentieth-century politics. The byways of his career link the most secret operations of revolutionary politics to central cultural events of the century. Through Münzenberg, the Kremlin is tied to Bloomsbury; the effects of his operations move from the Elysée to Hollywood and back to the Left Bank, from the life of Ernest Hemingway in Spain to André Gide speaking at the state funeral of Maxim Gorky. It is a thread that snakes through many mysteries, and across many encounters with betrayal, terror, and murder, not least of which is the possible murder of Münzenberg himself. It leads to the Second World War. It leads to the founding events of the Cold War.

Münzenberg was a companion of Lenin's during their pre-revolutionary days in Switzerland, and he was an important personality in the original Bolshevik circle. In 1915, Lenin was cooling his heels in Bern, fretful and furious as he waited for War to become Revolution. Münzenberg was then a young German radical, unaffiliated except through his talents and his rage. In 1914 he had met Leon Trotsky, and Trotsky, taking his measure, decided to bring him to Lenin himself.

What Trotsky had spotted in the cocky twenty-six-year-old German hothead was a talent for secret work. Münzenberg was presented to the future dictator as a wunderkind, a kid with a knack, like a computer whiz of a later age. Beginning in his teens, Willi had been promiscuously supplying all kinds of revolutionary groups with freelance clandestine networks: undercover systems for transmitting information, launder-

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ing money, forging passports, and beaming people across heavily guarded borders as if by magic. It seemed the boy could spin a network out of nothing. When Lenin met him, Willi's information was already speeding around Europe totally undetected: Conspiracies traveled in jam jars and cigar boxes; forged papers arrived in food parcels; plans for covert action stayed concealed, but moved. Münzenberg even had managed, quite on his own, to place an operative inside the Vatican. Trotsky understood that here was a young radical Lenin could *use*.

Lenin was duly impressed and introduced his discovery to Karl Radek, whereupon Münzenberg and Radek became a kind of team. Karl Radek was an exceptionally talkative and calculating Polish radical and literary intellectual. He was destined to become the Revolution's rationalizer. He was brilliant and glib, the cynically amused protégé of another Pole, Count Felix Dzerzhinsky, that man without humor whom infamy will forever remember as the inventor of the police state.

Among Lenin's men, the bond that held Dzerzhinsky, Radek, and Stalin together is an affiliation of the very greatest interest. Taken in their ensemble, they represent three of the essential strands that bind the knot of the terror state. Dzerzhinsky was the true believer, the sanctified fanatic of absolute state power. Stalin on the other hand was its ultimate politician, its grand tactician and bureaucrat. Radek was the new state's propagandist and apologist, the creator of its intellectual rationale, the man who fabricated its "human face," and much of its lie.

Dzerzhinsky was the founder of the Cheka, later to be renamed the OGPU, then the NKVD, then the KGB, the man who made the secret police the prime instrument of revolutionary justice. It is therefore especially fitting that in the great days of August 1991, the liberation from Marxism–Leninism in Russia should have been celebrated by the crowd tearing down the monumental statue of this monster of sanctimony where it stood in front of KGB headquarters.

Count Felix was the great ideologist of hatred and as such he is easy to hate. The difficult thing, and the more troubling thing, is to imagine how he was able to marshal so very much commitment and love. For Dzerzhinsky was far from being a mere brute; he was not an empty monster. He was a man whose passion, self-sacrifice, and faith won to the Revolution the allegiance of people driven by what were surely among the highest moral aspirations of their time. For the young Whittaker Chambers, as for the young Isaac Babel, Felix Dzerzhinsky was a visionary, a being who was bringing real justice to the real world, empowering life's highest ideals. In the glory days of the Revolution, when Dzerzhinsky and Lenin were laying the foundations of the totalitarian police state, life in the Cheka seemed invested with the prestige of a righteous elect, both at home and abroad. Abroad, what was "secret work" but the business of the ultimate liberation of humanity? And at home, who were agents of the Cheka but the Revolution's avenging angels? Indeed, in the days of its innocence, before it became so very obviously the province of murderers and thugs, the revolutionary secret police looked like the natural habitat of the new clerisy, a puritan high-priesthood, devout in its atheism. Here were the avengers of all the ancient evils; here were the enforcers of new heaven, new earth. No leader of the Revolution, not even Lenin himself, was more perfumed with the odor of sanctity than this sardonic and self-exalted Polish aristocrat, a Savonarola who reached his apotheosis in that totalitarian power of which he was a prime inventor. Ascetic, ravaged by revolution, bleak in his unforgiving certainties, radiant with hatred, Dzerzhinsky was Saint Terror.

Dzerzhinsky's protégé Radek, on the other hand, was the jeering cynic of the Revolution's rationale. Just as Dzerzhinsky thought that any death was justified if it served the Revolution, so Radek thought that any lie was vindicated in the glow of its truth. The union between them is only apparently improbable. Dzerzhinsky's sanctity and Radek's cynicism combined in a fusion

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of belief and disbelief, faith and scorn, bound together from their earliest days in Warsaw. It is one of the exemplary moral alliances of our era. Meanwhile, outside Russia, in the West, the jovial dynamo who organized that alliance and made it into a new system of power, lying for the truth, was Willi Münzenberg.

Lenin's propagandist

Münzenberg was unusual within the senior ranks of German Communism in having actually sprung from the working class. Very few of the true leading lights of German Communism were the tough proletarians of the Berlin slums who made up the party's mass base. Most of the real leaders were intellectuals, daughters and sons of the upper-middle class. But Willi was the real thing: the son of an alcoholic tavern-keeper in Thuringia, who while the boy was still young had killed himself one day cleaning his gun while drunk. In his teens, Willi survived as a barber's apprentice. It is possible that the genuine deprivations of his youth partly explain why Willi, unlike his more privileged peers, never affected the look of poverty once real power came his way. On the contrary: He swept up and down the Kurfürstendamm in an a enormous chauffeur-driven Lincoln limousine; he moved through the halls of power protected by a bodyguard. Like a captain of industry or a Chicago gangster, he was shaved and manicured every day by his own barber. He lived in an upper-class neighborhood of Berlin. His apartment was filled with Biedermeier; his entire manner of life was undimmed by the usual dour Communist style.

Yet despite his elegant surroundings, he was a real Communist, and a tough one at that. Willi's youthful photographs show a hard but well-dressed young German with a tight compact body about to spring, light on his feet, solid with energy. His head is large for his small body, and squarish; his forehead is high and impressive, crested with short tousled hair. His eyes, though warm, are shrewd. They assess the camera with a sly lethal glint. The line of his mouth could easily turn cruel; his smile seems granted only very conditionally. There is more than a little of the German tough guy about him. Safely behind closed doors, he moved with all the abrupt habits of command, rapping out his orders like a drill sergeant, foul-mouthed and ungrateful, striking the table with stubby strong workman's hands. Commanding, he was obeyed. He was simultaneously a born executive and a born agitator, and he remained both even after Lenin had made him the "red tycoon," wearing tailored suits and riding in that limousine. Arthur Koestler, who knew him well, called him "a fiery, demagogical, and irresistible public speaker." His voice rang to the rafters of the meeting halls of the Weimar Republic. He brought crowds shouting to their feet. He had the incendiary gift. Koestler reports that "he gave the impression that bumping against him would be like colliding with a steam roller. . . . Willi sauntered into a room with the casualness of a tank bursting through a wall. . . . His person emanated such authority that I have seen socialist cabinet members, hard-boiled bankers, and Austrian Dukes behave like schoolboys in his presence."

Münzenberg was "married," although in the Bohemian style of radicals between the wars, there never had been a wedding ceremony. His wife was a beautiful woman named Babette Gross, fine-boned, very tall, willowy. She was an intensely intelligent aristocratic Prussian; her father had been a rich brewer in Potsdam. She was highly educated; easily and fluently multilingual, as was her sister, Margarete Buber-Neumann, who, after a first marriage to a son of the philosopher Martin Buber, was married a second time to a prominent German Communist: Heinz Neumann, a revolutionary intellectual in the upper reaches of the German party.

Though a fierce radical and committed Communist, Babette was very much an

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upper-class girl. In youth as in age, the habits of her class must have merged with her politics and her style. To Willi, she must have looked not only beautiful but like the key to a world. Even when I knew Babette Gross, in her great age, the marks of that Prussian father were still stamped on her. She assumed authority in a way that was surely parallel to the way Willi had seized it. They were a pair as man and woman; they must also have been a pair in their feeling for power.

In fact, much in German Communism during its grand epoch between the two wars can be traced to a few intensely intellectual, often academic, families of the upper-middle class, people who belonged more to the world of Thomas Mann and his famous brood than Brecht's back streets. One thinks not only of Babette and her distinguished sister, but of two brilliant academic clans, the Eislers and the Kuczynskis, both family friends of the Manns, both filled with radical intellectuals who became spies, agents of influence, and covert operators in both the Second World War and the Cold War: Hanns and Gerhart Eisler, and their sister Ruth Fischer; Jürgen and Ruth Kuczynski, guided by their father, Robert René Kuczynski. Robert René was closely associated with Willi all through the Weimar years and remained a virtual "Münzenberg man" even after Hitler scattered the German left, and Robert René became an influential refugee teaching at the London School of Economics, serving the Revolution covered by the duplicities of Münzenberg's more-or-less legal wing. Kuczynski's children Jürgen and Ruth walked deeper into the shadow zone around Willi; both took the step into true espionage. During the war Jürgen served as a penetration agent inside the OSS, betraying the Americans. Ruth was trained as a spy in Russia, at a school for covert action founded hand in glove with Willi by the Comintern secret service. She worked in espionage first in China, under cover of Willi's illegal operations there, and later, during the war, in England. She became famous under her code name "Sonia," spying against the British, hovering around Bletchley Park. Here were people who instinctively understood the war of ideas in that adversary culture to which Münzenberg came as a stranger, but which he learned to manage and master as few people ever have.

When I met her in 1989, Babette Gross was ninety-one years old and still willowy. Like her sister, she had long since become a lucid and committed anti-Communist. As with her sister, her intelligence was still held in the grip of the tremendous events she had lived through. That July, after long consideration, Gross decided to grant me a full week of interviews in her small apartment on the Einsteinstrasse of Munich. I would arrive every day with my tape-recorder, and she would guide me through the history of the century as seen from the perspective of her place beside Münzenberg. It was strange to hear her speak of Lenin as a living man: "Münzenberg was always very impressed with Lenin's *political* skill. You know, Lenin never forgot a name." Of Trotsky, whom I gather she'd known in Mexico: "He always behaved exactly like a classical French man-of-letters." Though always very direct and plain, she would sometimes brush near the grand manner: for example, she twice spoke of "my sister, Buber-Neumann."

She spoke relaxed, idiomatic, excellent English, remarkable in a woman who (at least so far as I can determine) had never lived in an English-speaking country. She was utterly alert, and her self-possession was at once aristocratic and easy. In her many hours of talk with me, her conversation was always exact and searching; her style of political analysis, whether about events unfolding that July in Germany or conspiracies half a century old, was relentless and incisive. No detail escaped her interest. She tolerated no nonsense, and no deviation from the exact truth as she saw it. Listening to Gross talk about current European politics reminded me that this woman had shared a life with a man whose own political briefings, after he broke with Stalin in 1937, used to be held in a private dining room in

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Paris while senior agents of the intelligence services of several countries gathered round to listen like so many sophomores.

When I knew her in July of 1989, Babette did not have long to live. In the fall and winter of 1989, she was watching the collapse of German Communism as it accelerated and burst past every effort to hold it back. In her phone calls with me during this period, she retained her customary comprehensive attention to the inner workings of the scene. Her entire life had been lived either with or against the events now coming to their tremendous conclusion; she had lived at or near the center of the greatest political drama of her century. Now that drama was moving toward its end. As was her life. She became ill, and ill she went to Berlin for treatment. And so she was in the city of her youth as everything came full circle. Babette Gross was in Berlin as the Wall came down, and having seen the last fall, there she died in January 1990.

Karl Radek seems to have been Münzenberg's patron in Lenin's inner circle and was the means of his rise, though at the ripe age of thirty Radek wasn't all that much Münzenberg's senior. Before the Revolution, Radek's position among Lenin's men was rather like that of a press agent. The Bolsheviks were newspaper addicts, every one of them. It was one of their most characteristic obsessions. The sealed train that carried Lenin to the Finland Station was stacked to the ceiling with every paper in every language. The revolutionary passengers behind the drawn curtains of the cars passed the rocking hours reading every report. Radek's skill at this stage consisted of inventing the right news angle; planting the right story at the right time; heading off this or that opponent with this or that burst of bad publicity. Chewing on his pipe-stem, sneering at the journalists he conned and flattered, the youth was already an adept in the uses of information and disinformation. Radek and Münzenberg together escorted Lenin to the crowded platform in Zurich and the train into which the Bolsheviks were sealed ("like a bacillus in a tube," Churchill said) for their trip north through Germany, en route to their revolution. Radek was placed in the compartment beside the future dictator, while Münzenberg stayed behind, apparently because of a problem over his German nationality. Just before the train pulled out, it was to Münzenberg that either Radek or Lenin himself turned and shrugged off the famous line: "Six months from now we either will be in power or hanging from the gallows." So it was. After Lenin captured the Revolution, he was able to make his protégés two of the most powerful people in the world.

Münzenberg found himself in power. He was a man of action who was deprived of life when deprived of the resources of command. Unlike his allies Radek, Bukharin, and of course Lenin himself, he was in no way an intellectual. He had none of an intellectual's feeling for how to mine isolation, how to make even powerlessness a kind of opportunity. He was also a provincial. Though he orchestrated the voice of the International, he never spoke anything but his native German, and it was rather rough German at that, thick with a country accent. He had no particular literary skills. Hundreds of books were written to order for him, some memorable, and some even of lasting importance. He himself could barely bang together a more or less four-square paragraph. Virtually everything published under his own name was ghost-written.

The type of personality required to organize life in the shadowland of secret services is less that of the buccaneer than the executive. So it was with William Donovan of the OSS; so it was with Sir William Stephenson, Churchill's "Intrepid." So it was with Münzenberg. The Central Party Archives show that Willi's front organizations and networks of fellow travelers and propagandists were thoroughly intertwined with the secret services of the Comintern, and with the Soviets' other covert agencies as well. But Willi was not the man in the trenchcoat; that he left to others, people

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who reported to him, or to his men. Still less was he some shuffling bureaucrat from le Carré. He thought like a tycoon. Had he not been a revolutionary, he would have made a brilliant self-made millionaire. His saluting staff, his Biedermeier, his hovering barber and his limousine, all make one think less of le Carré's Karla than of Henry Luce.

Both before Hilter and after, Münzenberg's true role in the world was a closely guarded secret, though in keeping with his particular talent, it was concealed in conspicuousness. His talent was for propaganda, albeit of a special kind. For Willi Münzenberg was the first grand master of two quite new kinds of secret-service work, essential to this century, and to the Soviets: the covertly controlled propaganda front, and the secretly manipulated fellow traveler. His goal was to create for the right-thinking non-Communist West the dominating political prejudice of the era: the belief that any opinion that happened to serve the foreign policy of the Soviet Union was derived from the most essential elements of human decency. He wanted to instill the feeling, like a truth of nature, that seriously to criticize or challenge Soviet policy was the unfailing mark of a bad, bigoted, and probably stupid person, while support was equally infallible proof of a forward-looking mind committed to all that was best for humanity and marked by an uplifting refinement of sensibility.

To create his networks of fronts and fellow travelers Münzenberg used every resource of propaganda, from highbrow cultural opinion to funny hats and balloons. He organized the media: newspapers, film, radio, books, magazines, the theater. Every kind of "opinion maker" was involved: writers, artists, actors, commentators, priests, ministers, professors, "business leaders," scientists, psychologists, anyone at all whose opinion the public was likely to respect.

Münzenberg's own public life was very visible. Before his flight from Germany after the Reichstag Fire in 1933, he was a German publisher, and in fact a big-time publisher, controlling an impressive network of left-wing publications. He was also a politician. As a Leninist he naturally despised representative democracy and intended to destroy it. But he found it useful to serve in the Reichstag, holding down an exceptionally safe seat provided by the party. The gloomy Sessions Chamber of the Reichstag, the hall where German democracy gathered, was a stuffy place, lined with dry wood paneling and hung with musty brocaded curtains. On February 27, 1933, that wood and brocade would kindle into a bonfire momentous enough to grant Hitler totalitarian power and give shape to the ideological clash that led to the Second World War. But until then, the Reichstag regularly rang with the voice of Münzenberg's radical anger. He flourished there, striding past his rival and secret admirer Goebbels, whitened by glaring flashbulbs, ready to tangle yet again in the checkmated politics of a Weimar Republic that it seemed nobody important had the smallest wish to save. Certainly not Goebbels. And certainly not Münzenberg.

Lastly, Münzenberg was nominally in charge of a Communist relief organization known as Workers International Relief, or the WIR. To invoke only a few of the organizations that were its clones, it was also known by its Russian acronym, MRP, which was in turn affiliated with an organization known as MOPR, or as the Red Aid, known in America as the International Labor Defense, or ILD. WIR was not taken very seriously by the grandees of power in Europe. It appeared to be a merely idealistic, or at least unexceptionable, institution, a sort of Red Cross for the Revolution, sponsoring good deeds for the hard left: cultural events to awaken the world's conscience; fundraisers for the persecuted; mobile soup kitchens for strikers in bleak factory yards.

Soup kitchens were the least of it.

Willi Münzenberg's true, and secret, job in the political world, the job insiders *did* take seriously, was to manage the unseen ties between this propaganda and great power.

His heyday lasted for a little less than fifteen years, from the Sacco–Vanzetti case in

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America to the Spanish Civil War. During that time, he was amazingly successful at mobilizing the intelligentsia of the West on behalf of a moralistic set of political attitudes responsive to Soviet needs. In the process, he organized and defined the "enlightened" moral agenda of his era. In a sense, Münzenberg's apparatus was as instrumental as any other single factor in giving direction to the political attitudes we now call The Thirties. Hundreds of groups and committees and publications operated under his auspices, or those of his agents. The writers, artists, journalists, scientists, educators, clerics, columnists, filmmakers, and publishers, either under his influence or regularly manipulated by his "Münzenberg men," present a startling list of notables from that era, from Ernest Hemingway to John Dos Passos to Lillian Hellman to George Grosz to Erwin Piscator to André Malraux to André Gide to Bertolt Brecht to Dorothy Parker . . . to Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and Anthony Blunt. Indeed, the entire cultural and intellectual apparatus of "idealistic" Stalinism outside Russia, and much of its secret *apparat*, operated within a system Münzenberg had guided into place.

Of course most of the fellow travelers who were run by these agents, and certainly most of the people who poured their idealism into the Münzenberg fronts, had no idea that their consciences were being orchestrated by operatives of Stalin's government. Most were true believers, people with dreams about a radical new Soviet-led, socialist "humanism." With a light sneer, Münzenberg dubbed this vast soft horde of the radical devout "innocents." His own phrase for the fronts he created to guide and direct their morally committed but politically naïve commitments was "Innocents' Clubs." The phrase is revealing. It points to all those thousands who were not, in the jargon of the secret trades, "witting." This was virtually everyone. In any covertly run front organization the number of people who know, *really* know, the agenda, and the true identity of its shapers, must be very, very few. The fewer the better.

But the word "innocence" also suggests a motive. I refer to the need for righteousness, righteousness in the biblical sense. The thirst for moral justification for one's life in the world is one of our deepest needs, one of our most powerful and essentially human drives, ignored at our cost and peril. In his "Innocents' Clubs," Münzenberg provided two generations of people on the left with what we might call the forum of righteousness. More perhaps than any other person of his era, he developed what may well be the leading moral illusion of the twentieth century: the notion that in the modern age the principal arena of the moral life, the true realm of good and evil, is politics. He was the unseen organizer of that variety of politics, indispensable to the adversary culture, which we might call Righteousness Politics. "Innocents' Clubs": The very phrase suggests how the political issues Münzenberg manipulated came for many to serve as a substitute for religious belief. He offered everyone, anyone, a role in the search for justice in our century. By defining guilt, he offered his followers innocence, and they seized upon it by the millions.

Except that in this forum, high, serious, honorable moral commitments found themselves joined, covertly, to profoundly sinister events. Münzenberg served Stalinism with every resource of propaganda and invented more, from the protest march to the mock-trial to the politicized writers' congress to the politicized arts festival to the celebrity letterhead to the ad hoc committee for causes numberless. As Koestler said, Münzenberg "produced Committees as a conjurer produces rabbits out of his hat." And his models for molding progressive opinion endured, outlasting him, running on their own moral momentum. Plainly, a phenomenon such as the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, held in Stockholm during the Vietnam War, was set up in conscious or unconscious emulation of Münzenberg's paradigm. In fact, much of the Peace Movement of the Vietnam Era, with its marches and interlocking committees, worked in the same way. Early in this cen-

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tury, Willi had uncovered the tremendous power available to those who know how to set the agenda of the Good. But he also knew, as his fate demonstrates, that this is a form of power that can be used for evil ends.

The Comintern

The instrument through which Münzenberg organized this cultural power was the Communist International, or, as it was almost always known, the Comintern. The Comintern was in many ways the quintessential Leninist institution, shaped from its inception by the two leading passions of Lenin's political personality: his obsession with secrecy, and his preoccupation with absolute power. Its aims were never even remotely democratic, never even remotely meliorist, and never were intended to provide any real assistance, however minute, to any branch of the left not entirely under Soviet control.

Lenin created the Comintern in 1919 as a means of spreading the Russian Revolution and of consolidating Marxism–Leninism's dominance over the worldwide left. The new dictator's purpose was to gather the world's radicals into one grand network of Communist parties under the control of *the* Revolution, *his* Revolution. In his fantasy, Lenin saw the Comintern laying a kind of long fuse that would snake from Russia into Europe, and above all to that grand, glorious, but unexploded bomb that weighed most on his mind: Germany. *The powder keg of Europe*: It was one of Lenin's favorite clichés. *Iskra*, so one of the most important early revolutionary journals was named: "The Spark." Lenin proposed to make the keg blow with a spark set by him and sent sizzling through the Comintern's invisible incendiary network, a vitalizing fire that would burn from his office straight in to the great German ammunition dump. Luckily for the Europe of the Twenties, the fuse fizzled. Even so, the Comintern's network had been well and truly laid down, and by the time Stalin came along it was still in place, ready for the new dictator to use. Europe, meanwhile, had run out of luck.

So the "First Congress" of the Comintern in 1919 was a meeting supposed to initiate the transformation of the world. Despite this ambitious aim, it was not a very impressive convocation. It was neither representative nor particularly international. Lenin slouched on the podium of a crowded little hall near the Moscow Courts of Justice and presided over thirty-five scrappy "delegates"—mainly foreign socialists who happened to be in town. Few had any real connection to their national politics. One English "delegate" was merely Cicherin's secretary, a Russian emigré who'd once been a tailor in England. The Japanese were "represented" by a man with the un-Nipponese name of Rutgers, who'd chanced once to spend some months in Japan. At one point Lenin slipped a note to his ally Angelica Balabanoff ordering her to take the platform and "announce the affiliation of the Italian Socialist Party." She stared back. There was no such group in the room, nor had she been in contact with them. "There was," wrote one English witness, "a make-believe side to the whole affair."

The Congress was make-believe because Lenin did not want it otherwise. On the contrary. The last thing he wanted would have been some dreary posse of international socialists weakening his grip with the babble of their little ideas, their niggling opinions, their trifling—a favorite word, "trifling"—reservations. The "congress" was a façade, held to give the look of a broad base for what Lenin always intended to be a compact, secret, strictly obedient weapon under the control of his government. Once the brow-beaten delegates dispersed, he simply dashed off an article in *Pravda* blandly announcing that "the Soviets have conquered throughout the whole world."

That was the imaginary Comintern. The real Comintern was a corps of disciplined professional revolutionaries, put in place to enforce Leninist hegemony throughout the socialist movement worldwide. To this end it ran its own propaganda network and had

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its own secret service, with both branches intimately linked to each other and to the other Soviet secret services. Their work was at once legal and illegal, and in Münzenberg's case, the two often mingled in special ingenuity. The Comintern's secret service was known as the OMS, and Münzenberg worked in steady collaboration with it; the Central Party Archives show Münzenberg's enterprises intermingled and surrounded by elaborate secret-service work. Münzenberg worked in close collaboration with the director of the OMS, Mirov-Abramov. In addition, substantial evidence strongly indicates that his principal lieutenants were covertly linked to branches of the Soviet services outside the Comintern. One of Münzenberg's tasks was to invent ways to blur the distinction between legal and illegal work and, trailing clouds of deniability, install his men in the resulting never-never land.

While the cultural network had a very public face, it worked in tandem with deep-cover espionage networks. The evidence is strong that two of Münzenberg's principal lieutenants, Louis Gibarti and Otto Katz, were not only "Münzenberg-men," and so agents of the Comintern, but (probably without Willi knowing for sure) agents of the NKVD as well. Gibarti and Katz: an extraordinary team. They *did* know something about trenchcoats, and careful tracking of their artful dodging through the first half of the twentieth century will turn up surprise after surprise. Gibarti was an elegant but slightly seedy Hungarian, affable, multilingual, and outspoken. He looked, said Babette, like "an opera cavalier." Gibarti ranks as a founding father of the modern mingling of propaganda with espionage and covert action. Though his modus operandi made him seem like a "legal"—in contrast to illegal—Comintern agent, Gibarti's "perfectly legal" organizations were pioneers in the art of doing secret-service business in the open. It was Gibarti, for example, who in 1934 guided a young recruit named Kim Philby through a "perfectly legal" front in Paris and on to Vienna, where Philby took up his first real job as a secret agent.

"Legal" operations, meanwhile, might pursue their propaganda ends while supplying illegal operations with cover. Consider, for example, those honey-hives of the intellectuals, bookstores. In the early days, the Comintern often used bookstores simultaneously as propaganda outlets *and* as fronts for transmitting information for the espionage *apparat*. In Shanghai, Richard Sorge made use of such an establishment within the network; its wonderful name, the "Zeitgeist Bookshop." In New York during the Thirties, a then Communist bookseller named Walter Goldwater was approached by Whittaker Chambers, using the name "Hugh Jones," and asked to establish a bookstore near Columbia University, the back room of which was to be used for the apparatus of espionage. Similarly, Münzenberg was a pioneer in the creation of a "Press Agency" which on the one hand might place perfectly legitimate journalism from independent writers and sources in legitimate journals, and on the other hand place fabricated stories which the *apparat* wanted placed for propaganda, *and* serve as cover for working agents, *and* serve as cover for the flow of information obtained in espionage. Münzenberg's man Gibarti seems to have helped invent this sort of front.

But Münzenberg's information network controlled newspapers and radio stations, ran film companies, created book clubs, ran magazines, sponsored publicity tours, dispatched journalists, and commissioned books. It planted articles and created organizations to give direction to the "innocent." To use the jargon of a different age, it was a media combine. Yet it differed in a number of ways from the BBC, Time Inc., or even from an explicit instrument of political propaganda like Radio Liberty. For example, many people working for it did not publicly acknowledge the connection. Many operated under aliases. Many led classic double lives, sometimes totally changing their identities, concealing their true mission from their friends, even their spouses, and certainly from employers, who often included unsuspecting editors, publishers, and pro-

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ducers whose ideas were very remote from the real agenda. They were, in short, secret agents, people who lived and worked, however publicly, in a secret world: the realm of intelligence gathering, covert action, undercover penetration, clandestine influence, quiet sabotage, discreet blackmail—what the American counter-spy James Jesus Angleton, quoting T. S. Eliot, called "a wilderness of mirrors." Nor did the work stop with the media. Münzenberg also courted business people who could be used in industrial espionage, both in Europe and the United States. Given Lenin's obsession with electrification, for example, an early target was General Electric. And back when the revolution was still young, it was Münzenberg's task to create for much of this vast unseen enterprise a persuasive public face.

Münzenberg clearly understood that the Revolution required something more than winning over "the masses." Speaking to a Comintern packed with intellectuals, he pounded at his point: "*We must organize the intellectuals*." The revolution *needed* middle-class opinion makers—artists, journalists, "people of good will," novelists, actors, playwrights . . . *humanists*, people whose innocent sensitivities weren't yet cauterized to nervelessness by the genuine white-hot radical steel. Lenin himself recoiled at this idea. Here were the people he loathed most—he who loathed so many people. Middle-class do-gooders? Bourgeois intellectuals clutching their precious "freedom of conscience"? Lenin would kill and imprison them by the thousands. It took him a while—until 1921—to consent to use them, too. "We must avoid being a purely Communist organization," Münzenberg explained to his men. "We must bring in other names, other groups, to make persecution more difficult." Middle-class opinion makers, liberal sympathizers, however much *echt* Bolsheviks despised them, must be used. Co-option may have struck hard-line Leninists as soft, but as Münzenberg pointed out, the powder keg was not blowing despite all kinds of sparks. Münzenberg dismissed these impatient purists and the fanaticism of absolutes with sardonic weariness. "I too," he drawled, "prefer the red hundreds."

Finally, there was the pursuit and organization of that special category of influential opinion maker, the fellow traveler. Little though he liked bourgeois humanists, or indeed any kind of humanist, Lenin came to see what Stalin never doubted: that to achieve its end, the Revolution outside Russia would need to exploit non-Communist sympathizers, especially leaders in culture, sympathizers capable of setting the agenda of the Good. Western opinion could never be marshaled strictly from a Bolshevik platform. The world's idealists would never trust a leadership so obviously defined by fanaticism, so plainly committed to pure post-legal *force majeure*, so manifestly bound to hatred. The image of the "human face" needed to be created by "spokesmen" who attracted sympathy, not fear; famous, prestigious, and "independent" spokesmen who would reassure the non-Communist world that despite appearances all was well, Utopia really was a-building; that they had been over to see the future, and the socialist future was sweet and good.

These spokesmen would have to be organized, promoted, and made reliable. It was essential that closely controlled fellow travelers such as Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, Lincoln Steffens and Heinrich Mann, be made to believe in their own independence, an independence they would of course rarely exercise. Every resource of manipulation, from rudimentary group psychology to plain bribery, was used to keep these ranks of the famous and influential left safely Stalinist in everything *except* name. As for the name, *that* had to be avoided at all costs. That would destroy the most useful thing about them, which was the deceptive but indispensable look of their "independence."

Managing these "independent spokesmen," keeping them saying the right things to support the cumbersome Big Lie they served—all this could be a very tricky business, and Münzenberg devoted all his in-

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genuity to it. "When it came to the manipulation of fellow travelers," Babette Gross writes, "[Münzenberg] left nothing to chance." From the tightly interlocked sets of fellow travelers in Hollywood to the systems of Parisian left-wing cultural chic, he arranged the celebrities into guided and controlled networks, assigning agents to their management, focusing on given communities in the arts, in journalism, in the academy. Here again, non-paranoiac Westerners may have some difficulty grasping that an elaborate secret-service network was set up to keep this large number of celebrity sympathizers appearing in the right places and reading the right lines. It is quite true that once a fashionable opinion was properly launched, it would quite spontaneously develop and grow among the ranks of enlightened people. Gibarti is said to have called this ripple effect in cultural politics "rabbit breeding." But the original instigation of that fashion, its placement among the leaders of cultural politics—this was the province of professionals.

All this of course had to be secret and denied. And in addition the public charade, there was the deeper matter of managing what we might call the denial within. Every device of vanity and venality, misused trust and intellectual obfuscation was employed. But there was something more. The fellow travelers needed to believe too that their Stalinism was an indispensable part of their own integrity, a key to the working of their intelligence, and to the practice of their arts. They needed to *believe*. In order for this to happen, the apparatus had to seize on the most salient moral claims of the adversary culture from which almost all these people emerged, and make it theirs. If Americans in the adversary culture understood that the oppression of blacks was the society's great institutionalized crime, Stalinism would take the highest of high ground on the "Negro question." No matter that Stalin ruled a country where a significant part of the population languished in slave labor camps. If the English adversary culture saw philistinism and middle-class repression as the enemy, Stalinism would embrace iconoclastic taste and sexual liberty as nobody else did; the Bohemianism and flamboyant homosexuality of Guy Burgess were an indispensable part of his slick Stalinism and central to his place in Bloomsbury. No matter that Soviet sexual policy and taste were intolerant to a degree that made Colonel Blimp look liberated.

The net effect of these façades was to bind Stalinism to the self-evident truths of a given adversary culture, and make that Stalinism feel indispensable to an enlightened life. The role of this in the "denial within" could be very potent. It could be addictive.

But direct management was also required. Agents were often specifically trained to enter the life of this or that "independent thinker"—assuming the independent thinker was famous or influential enough. The idea was to influence and monitor the fellow traveler's life, and, if possible, run it. With the more important cultural grandees, intimate friends, sexual partners, and even wives could be assigned: political operatives put in place to manipulate the great man in question, while remaining in regular contact with Münzenberg's people.

The Russian writer and historian Nina Berberova writes with astringent authority about a cohort of agents or near-agents, the women whom she calls the "Ladies of the Kremlin." These were women who became influential figures in European and American intellectual life partly on their own, but above all through the men in their lives. The men, most often, were famous writers, "spokesmen for the West." Meanwhile, the consorts whom they most trusted were guided by the Soviet services.

Leading this list were two members of the minor Russian aristocracy: the Baroness Moura Budberg, who was mistress to both Maxim Gorky and H. G. Wells,[1] and the Princess Maria Pavlova Koudachova, who first became secretary, later mistress, wife,

1 Exactly what the Baroness Budberg's connection to the Soviets may have been remains mysterious, though its importance cannot be doubted.

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and at last widow to the once enormously celebrated pacifist novelist Romain Rolland. Mme Berberova proposes a number of other candidates for inclusion among the "Kremlin Ladies": The wives of both Paul Eluard and Ferdinand Léger are among them. Perhaps. Certainly one of the most important was Elsa Triolet, sister of Mayakovsky's great love Lily Brik, who in Louis Aragon found her very own "great poet." With Aragon, Triolet presided over the high chic of European Stalinism for thirty years, knave to Aragon's fool, intimate with the most repellent figures in the Stalinist apparatus.

In America, one might add to the list the name of Ella Winter, who began her career in politics being introduced by Felix Frankfurter to Lincoln Steffens in the midst of the Versailles Conference. Steffens fell in love with her, and their relation lasted the rest of his life. Throughout the Twenties, Winter moved more and more obviously into the role of a classic fellow traveler, resolutely guiding the famous muckraker into the paths of her Stalinism as she did so. By the time of his death, it must be said that Lincoln Steffens had become a creature, an intellectual abject.

After Steffens's death, Winter proceeded to another marriage that was exceptionally useful from the *apparat*'s point of view. This one put her in a leading position managing the networks of Stalinist fellow travelers in Hollywood, a long-standing special concern of the apparatus, with much attention from Gibarti, Katz, and many others. Winter met and married a very successful Hollywood screenwriter, Donald Ogden Stewart—a companion to Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos; a runner with the bulls at Pamplona in the company of the circle immortalized in *The Sun Also Rises*. Stalinism and Hemingway aside, Stewart was an attractive but malleable guilt-ridden lightweight. And at his side, Ella Winter was ideally placed for an active life among networks of Stalinist opinion in the film colony.

Ella Winter worked closely with Münzenberg's men, especially those who were active in Hollywood. She knew Otto Katz well, and Gibarti referred to Ella Winter as "one of the most trusted party agents for the West Coast." Gibarti had every reason to know.

So Münzenberg had been among the most potent organizers of the apparatus of the Comintern. He was so successful, in fact, that by 1921 the Comintern's head, Gregori Zinoviev, was beginning to feel threatened. At the 1921 Congress, Zinoviev momentarily maneuvered Münzenberg out of his main party position of the time, running the Young Communist League. It turned out to be a fortunate fall: It left Willi free for his new and great political role—as director of the Comintern's propaganda combine.

The combine was a network for molding opinion and (not least) for secret political action. It included not only press agencies but newspapers, magazines, and film production companies, and had offices around the world, with branches in Moscow (staffed mainly by Germans) and its headquarters in Berlin. Münzenberg assembled what amounted to a huge, secretly co-ordinated media consortium. It came to be known, with cheerless Bolshevik irony, as "The Münzenberg Trust."

The story of the Trust has rarely been told. Arthur Koestler only hints at its complexity in his autobiographical book, *The Invisible Writing*:

> Out of the pamphlets issued in support of the relief campaign grew the Trust's own publishing firms, its book clubs, its multitudes of magazines and newspapers. By 1926, Willi owned two daily newspapers in Germany with mass circulations, *Berlin am Morgen* and *Welt am Abend*; the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, a weekly with a circulation of one million, the Communist counterpart of *Life*; a series of other magazines including technical magazines for photographers, radio amateurs, etc., all with an indirect Communist slant. In Japan, to quote a remote country as an example, the Trust directly or indirectly controlled nineteen magazines and newspapers. It also financed Communist avant-garde plays which were in great vogue at the time.

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In the United States, *The Nation* magazine was for many years edited or greatly influenced by people, ranging from Louis Fischer to Julio Alvárez del Vayo, whose careers were shaped in close collaboration with Münzenberg and his men. It was a propaganda combine extending from Moscow to Berlin to Paris to London to New York to Hollywood to Shanghai to Delhi.

Nor did Willi limit himself to print. Münzenberg's impact was no less powerful in the theater and the graphic arts. From George Grosz to Erwin Piscator, much of vanguard Weimar culture was funded by Münzenberg. Then there was his impact upon the emergent cinema of the left. At a very early stage of its existence Münzenberg used one of his many dummy corporations—Aufbau, Industrie & Handels, A.G.—quietly to buy up distribution rights in the USSR to almost all German films then on the market. The revenues from this shrewd investment soon engendered the capital needed for a German-based distribution company called Prometheus Films, the instrument through which Soviet cinema of the grand epoch was released and promoted in the West. Prometheus's first release was Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, with a score commissioned by Münzenberg's in-house composer, Edmund Meisel. Eisenstein's great prestige in the democracies was very much a creation of the Münzenberg machine. Prometheus soon became a production company for German film as well, and in 1927 Münzenberg added yet another subsidiary, Welt Film, for the equivalent of sixteen-millimeter non-theatrical distribution. Through this company the Trust encouraged the creation of college film societies in England and America, all featuring Soviet cinema, the gathering places for a new left-wing university elite, where *Potemkin* and *October* were screened in basements against bedsheets. In the United States, a parallel organization used many names and passed through many forms, until it ended, rather innocuously, as a company called Brandon Films.

Then in 1924 Willi moved even more dramatically. A complete production company was established in Moscow, capitalized, staffed, and controlled by Münzenberg; that is, by the Comintern. Following the Russian acronym for WIR, which was MRP, the company was Mezhropohmfilm Russ and it became the prime production house of Soviet cinema in its grand epoch, the studio for Vertov, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin. Mezhropohmfilm made real movies, including a number of very great ones, for real audiences. Meanwhile its networks provided legal cover for many secret agents with quite different missions, and with the addition of this third pillar to his tripod, Münzenberg's hegemony over Soviet cinema became close to complete, and firmly located on the Berlin–Moscow axis.

The Sacco–Vanzetti Case

Like Lenin, like Stalin, Münzenberg was almost laughably ignorant about the United States. He visited it only once in his life, in 1934, and was surprised to discover how agreeable, how free and open a place it was, compared to what he had known. Yet even at remote control, Willi managed to insinuate his plans and people into the moral life of America with durable results. Around 1925, the Comintern entrusted Münzenberg and his propaganda machine with a little-known but large role in giving shape and political function to the Communist Party of the United States as it was to be under Stalin. At that time, the American party, that congregation of the militant naïve, home and battleground for John Reed and Louise Bryant, needed to be re-assembled. It had been left in a shattered state by its late-Leninist internal struggles combined with devastating police action inflicted on it by what later became the FBI.

The course adopted then is revealing. No effort was made to create a mass-based movement appropriate to the seizure of power in America. It is plain that Stalin had no serious interest or belief in an American "revolution." He never attempted to create

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an American party or Communist movement capable of even remotely challenging the constitutional power, as he would do in Germany, Italy, France, Greece, and the Balkans. That was not to be the American party's job. The apparatus of American Communism would be directed instead toward discrediting American politics and culture and assisting the growth of Soviet power elsewhere. It sought not revolutionary power inside America but moral authority developed through the propaganda of righteousness in politics. It sought not the outright destruction of the American democracy, however much that might be desired, but practical influence on its culture, the placement of agents who would over the long term seek to smoothe and promote the advance of Soviet influence and assist the apparatus in its work of espionage. The American right may have given itself nightmares about the red flag flying over the Capitol and commissars storming the East Room, but I know of no evidence showing that such a thing was ever really part of Stalin's dream; his 1927 remark, made to gullible visitors, that the Sacco–Vanzetti scandal showed America in pre-revolutionary turmoil, was surely a matter of atmospherics. Lenin's mind was centered upon Germany; Stalin's was on Russia and its vast sphere of power. America lay beyond, a very distant albeit important place, an irritating mystery. An irritating *myth*. And it was in the arena of myth, not that of the seizure of power, that America had the Soviets' full and frightened attention.

For the world proletariat of 1925, the leading counter-myth to the myth of revolution was, by far, the *idea* of America. That vision—the notion of the melting pot, the Golden Door, the Land of Opportunity—is what held the real political attention of the International. To the Bolsheviks, this was the true American menace. And in 1925, the task of the American party was to counteract it.

So Münzenberg's first idea was to create and sustain a worldwide anti-American campaign that would focus its appeal upon the mythology of the country's immigration. The purpose of such a campaign would be to instill a reflexive loathing of the United States and its people as a prime tropism of left-wing enlightenment. To undermine the myth of the Land of Opportunity, the United States would be shown as an almost insanely xenophobic place, murderously hostile to foreigners.

To this end, Münzenberg surveyed his options, in search of a cause that would disgrace America in the eyes of the proletarian foreign-born. He found it in the obscure case of two anarchist immigrants who'd got themselves into some very bad trouble: Niccola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

Every so often, talking with me in Munich, Babette Gross would drop a remark that made the foundations of the world seem to shift a little. One of these was over Sacco and Vanzetti. The Sacco–Vanzetti case? "It was," she said with a dry shrug, "Münzenberg's idea."

Münzenberg's idea! Is that *possible*? Together with the Dreyfus case, this is perhaps the most famous legal struggle in the whole history of modern propaganda and injustice. It seemed at first incredible to me that this epochal case could have been manipulated at such a distance, and so cynically.

And indeed the origins of the Sacco–Vanzetti case are far more complex than that. Yet in one sense the Sacco–Vanzetti campaign does turn out to have been "Münzenberg's idea." It was indeed at Münzenberg's instigation that Communist propaganda networks worldwide took up the plight of the two Boston immigrants and made it the centerpiece of a vast new anti-American operation—just as a little later it was Willi's executive decision to turn the Scottsboro Boys into prime martyrs for the International. The Comintern and Willi's organization were the ones who transformed a case of troubled local injustice into a worldwide *cause célèbre*.

In that effort, however, the Communists latched onto the Sacco–Vanzetti case as latecomers and opportunists. Sacco and Van-

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zetti were not themselves Communists, and theirs was not, at first, a Communist struggle. The two Italians were anarchists, and so their political myth was shaped during the early 1920s by anarchists, guided especially by that doyen of Italo-American radicalism, Carlo Tresca.

By the mid-1920s, however, the political sponsorship of the case decisively changed. In 1926, the American Communist Party stood directionless and in disarray, very much in need of a new motivating spirit and a new task. At the same time, the International was demanding its anti-American cause. The Soviet propagandists decided to satisfy both these needs at once. In 1926, speaking to his colleagues in the WIR, Münzenberg announced it was their task, as propagandists, to rescue the American party and supply its new direction. And so it was: the first task of a revived American party was to seize and hold the Sacco–Vanzetti case for its own, while around the world the Comintern turned it into *the* preoccupying moral issue of the era. By 1928, Willi was cooly and quite correctly claiming credit for the Sacco–Vanzetti campaign, understood as a worldwide political moral mania, and among the highest triumphs of his apparatus.

Here is how it worked. Way back in 1920, two Italian immigrants, both militant anarchists, were arrested and charged with stealing the payroll of a Braintree, Massachusetts, shoe factory and murdering its paymaster and his guard. In 1921, they were tried, convicted, and sentenced to death.

The two men belonged to a small anarchist cell of Italian immigrants like themselves. When the pair was arrested, this group immediately formed a defense committee. Naïvely convinced that the two would get off, they proposed creating "great publicity for the anarchist movement."

But Sacco and Vanzetti did not get off. Nor did their case advance the anarchist cause; its later co-option by the Communists was used to betray and undermine American anarchism. The Defense Committee was right about one thing: These two men's condemnation offered the basis for a political vision.

That vision in its anarchist incarnation was the creation of one man above all: an eccentric Westerner, one of the grand lawyers of the American left, a brilliant but more flaky Clarence Darrow named Fred Moore, recommended to the Defense Committee by Carlo Tresca. Moore was, in the words of his assistant, Eugene Lyons, an "artist handicapped by a genius for non-conformity." He was a heavy-using cocaine addict (the Defense Committee more than once used their less idealistic Italian connections to keep him supplied), a drawling Westerner with his revolver often slung in his back pocket, given to affronting judicial dignity by padding around courtrooms in his stocking feet.

Moore invented the case. He set out to rescue his clients with any and every maneuver a fertile legal mind could conceive, convinced they were lost without the pressure of outraged world opinion. To this end, long before Münzenberg knew anything about the case, he single-handedly created the *political* argument of Sacco and Vanzetti: that they were powerless, despised, radical immigrants being subjected to judicial murder by a smug, chauvinist, puritanical, nativist, red-scared New England establishment. In promoting this defense, Moore was unscrupulous, ingenious, indefatigable, driven. Of his passion and sincerity there can be no doubt. He was a man obsessed. And his belief in his clients' innocence was quite genuine. At first.

Except unfortunately their innocence *wasn't* quite genuine. Best evidence shows beyond all reasonable doubt that Sacco was in fact one of the Braintree gunmen and the murderer of the guard, whom he shot to death after the man had fallen to his hands and knees, begging for his life while struggling to reach his own revolver. Vanzetti may have been innocent of the Braintree holdup, though he probably knew or guessed Sacco's guilt. He certainly had guilty knowledge of Sacco's participation in an earlier robbery where no blood had been spilled.

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In a way, the facts make the two men's political solidarity all the more compelling. One word of the truth from either man—Sacco in ordinary decency; Vanzetti in ordinary self-protection—would have saved Vanzetti's life. But it also would have demolished their cause in *disgrazia*. Bartolomeo Vanzetti laid down his life on the bloody altar not of justice but of propaganda. He died lying for the truth.

The murky integrity of this self-sacrifice gives Vanzetti—he was in every way the more interesting of the pair—a tremendously affecting dignity. It also sustained his stumbling, broken, justly famous eloquence. "If it had not been for this thing, I might have live out my life talking on street corners to scorning men. I might have die unknown, unmarked, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph."

The little coterie of anarchists on the Defense Committee also knew the truth, and they too maintained the vow of silence for *la causa*. The last survivor, a man named Ideale Gambera, wrote a full account of the affair for disclosure by his son after his death. Gambera died in 1982, and his son released the documents to Francis Russell, a principal scholar of the case. It was the last word.

Somewhere along the way, Fred Moore seems to have stumbled onto the truth as well. There is no evidence that this in any way modified Moore's passion for his clients' defense, but in 1923, in the midst of a paranoid psychotic episode (he'd attempted suicide and was hospitalized), Sacco dismissed Moore in a violent incoherent rage. Taking his dismissal with dignity, Moore packed up, got into his car, and drove back west, selling knickknacks as he went to pay for his gasoline.

The case now began to die. The appeals dragged on, but the headline makers of the world had dropped the Massachusetts fishmonger and shoemaker. Then, in 1925, on orders of Münzenberg and the Comintern, an American branch of the Red Aid called the International Labor Defense, created in Chicago with James Cannon as its director, was set up to be the focus of organization for the new American Communism. Its first mission was to make the Sacco–Vanzetti case into a worldwide myth.

The campaign became a juggernaut, tenaciously co-ordinated from Berlin, vast and unrelenting. Now, once again, protest meetings gathered to shout and sob in the great squares. From all its outlets, organs of the Trust produced an unstanchable stream of attacks on the assassin viciousness of American justice, defending the innocence and holiness of the immigrant martyrs in Braintree. Around the world, heart-rending appeals for cash were staged to provide for Sacco and Vanzetti's defense and "protection." Children gave their pennies, workers donated wages, philanthropists opened their checkbooks.

The *apparat*'s fund-raising was, incidentally, an almost complete fraud. Sacco and Vanzetti and their Defense Committee saw next to none of the money raised in their names. Of the approximately half-million dollars raised in the United States, the Defense Committee received something like $6,000. Of large sums collected in mass protest meetings around the world, the Defense Committee saw precisely nothing.

Cannon seems to have understood that Sacco was guilty, and so Münzenberg very possibly also knew the truth. Not that anybody cared. The Communist goal was never to save the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti. Acquittal would have dissolved the whole political point. Katherine Anne Porter, like hundreds of writers and artists of the time, participated in the Boston deathwatch. She reports an exchange with the Comintern agent who was her group leader, Rosa Baron, "a dry, fanatical little woman who wore thick-lensed spectacles over her accusing eyes, a born whiphand, who talked an almost impenetrable jargon of party dogma. . . . I remarked . . . that even then, at that late time, I still hoped the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti could be saved. . . . 'Saved' she said, ringing a change on her favorite answer to political illiteracy, 'who wants them saved? What earthly good would they do us alive?'"

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Francis Russell, in his *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Case Resolved* (1986), describes the European demonstrations:

> Demonstrations took place that autumn in France and Italy, with lesser demonstrations in Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Scandinavia, and South America. A bomb exploded in the American embassy in Paris. Another was intercepted in the Lisbon consulate. Reds in Brest stoned the consulate there. American consuls in Mexico were threatened with death if Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. In Rome, thousands of workers marched on the American embassy demanding justice for their compatriots.
>
> Some of this agitation was anarchist inspired, some actually spontaneous, but most of it was directed by Communist leaders in Paris.

Best evidence suggests that one of the witting Münzenberg men on the scene in Boston was a rather appealing personality of the American left, named Gardner Jackson. Jackson was another charmer, a hard-drinking sandy-haired journalist in the Will Rogers vein, who loved cowboy boots and old tweeds, a radical who had spent his life claiming to be just a guy on the left, nothing but a rich boy from Wyoming who liked his bourbon and wanted to see the little guy get an even break. In truth Jackson was intimate with Münzenberg's most senior operatives in America, and though he was probably a much-manipulated fellow traveler rather than a fully witting operative, by 1939 Gardner was fronting for Gibarti in the Roosevelt administration. He was almost certainly a front man in the Sacco–Vanzetti campaign as well.

With his lanky manner and sinning smile, Jackson was very successful with women. Dorothy Parker, for example, became quite infatuated with him during the Sacco–Vanzetti protest, and it may well have been he who guided Parker toward what seems to have been her secret membership in the Communist Party. It was a link of real importance to the apparatus six or seven years later when, along with Lillian Hellman, Parker became a leading celebrity front figure in Hollywood fellow-traveling networks. Looking back on *la causa* from the Hollywood Hills, Parker seems to have found some essential element of her identity in this kind of politics. It may seem bizarre today to see Communist politics shaping and giving direction to the smart-cracking bittersweet comedy of such a woman, with her curious comic blend of self-righteousness and self-contempt. But in its time, Parker's union of style and Stalinist attitudes was a natural fit. Through the chic of her hard-left commitments, Parker could both validate her love of glamour and mask it with an appropriate look of disdain for all the vanities.

Right around the same time, Gardner Jackson was developing his influence over another woman in Boston. This was Marion Frankfurter, the wife of Felix Frankfurter, then a leading professor of law at Harvard and later one of this century's great justices of the U.S. Supreme Court. Frankfurter was drawn into the affair by the dual force of his passion for justice and his concern for his wife. Marion Frankfurter had a frightening history of mental instability. Her delicate psychiatric state preoccupied her husband and of course tangled his otherwise steadfast loyalty and courage with inevitable emotions of guilt, fear, and the wish to escape.

During the Sacco–Vanzetti campaign, Gardner Jackson placed the cultivation of a thoroughly ingratiating relationship with the Frankfurters high among his prime concerns. His point of focus was Marion. Jackson was a famously seductive man; though his attentions to Marion Frankfurter were surely platonic, they were also incessant. He lucidly saw and exploited her insecurity, her need to anchor herself in a cause, her problem balancing her own sense of inadequacy against the brilliance of her incandescent and intensely ambitious husband.

Marion Frankfurter became preoccupied with Gardner and, through him, with the case. Gardner in turn flattered Marion continually. He arranged to have her join him as

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co-editor of Sacco and Vanzetti's letters. He involved her at every public level.

It seems plain that the real purpose of this tactic was to reach Felix. Gardner seems to have guessed that Frankfurter's wish to support his wife's cause would lead him into the fold as well. He was correct. The couple became mutually obsessed, egged on at every step by Jackson, who became their constant companion. When the condemned men's last appeal was denied, the outraged Felix proceeded to write one of the most powerful polemics of his career, a denunciation of the case's legal history, a brilliant exercise in controlled vituperation. The piece appeared in *The Atlantic*. It was more influential than any other factor in marshaling American non-radical opinion behind the pair, and it was even more influential in Europe. Münzenberg's Berlin office arranged for it to be reprinted throughout the world, while in London H. G. Wells produced a flamboyant summary which promptly became the received British view.

What followed was orchestrated multinational mass hysteria.

August 22 was the night of the executions, and around them the *apparat*, poising itself for the outpouring of international grief, organized a vast international deathwatch. Francis Russell describes the event:

> After the news flashed from Charleston that Sacco and Vanzetti had at last been executed, the reverberations were international. Demonstrations in American cities were duplicated and in many places exceeded all over Europe. In Paris the Communist daily *Humanité* printed an extra sheet on which was splashed the single block word "*Assassinés!*" Crowds surged down the Boulevard Sebastopol, ripping up lampposts and tossing them through plate glass windows. Protective tanks ringed the American embassy, and sixty policemen were injured when a mob tried to set up barricades there. Five thousand militants roamed the streets of Geneva the evening before the executions, overturning American cars, sacking shops selling American goods, gutting theaters showing American films. One of the greatest demonstrations in the history of the Weimar republic took place in Berlin; there were tumultuous demonstrations in Bremen and Wilhelmshaven and Hamburg, and a two hour torchlight parade in Stuttgart. During that turbulent week, half a dozen German demonstrators were killed. No one was killed in England, but on the night of the executions, a crowd gathered in front of Buckingham Palace and sang "The Red Flag."

The night of the executions was marked by a vigil at Charleston Prison. Before this dour building an enormous crowd gathered in the dark. "I was never in that place before," Porter wrote, "but I seem to remember that it was a great open space with the crowd massed back from a center the police worked constantly to keep clear. They were all mounted on fine horses and loaded with pistols and hand grenades and tear gas bombs." The law in its generosity provides that the condemned are entitled to every minute of their last day. After having been granted this largess, Sacco and Vanzetti were led to the death chamber at midnight exactly. Sacco entered it first, at 12:11. Vanzetti followed at 12:20. By 12:27 both had been pronounced dead. Both men met their end with indescribable dignity.

So the American Communist Party was revived, in part, to function as a local instrument in a worldwide and remarkably successful effort to create a new anti-American myth, the support and development of which persisted for decades to come.

Suicide or murder?

The Comintern was the apple of Lenin's eye. Stalin, on the other hand, despised the institution, as he despised so many things, and so deeply. To be sure, he used the Comintern apparatus with ruthless virtuosity and raised it to previously unknown heights of activity. Even so he had contempt for its fur-

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tive intriguing intellectuals, its internationalist palaver, its big dreams. He took control of it early, and finding its obedience insufficiently abject, he penetrated it from top to bottom with his other services. Eventually he dissolved it. He used to call its Moscow headquarters, in passing, *lavotchka*: the "grocer's hut," "the gyp-joint." Yet he also made it one of the most efficient and pervasive secret institutions in history.

Münzenberg was Stalin's tool. This must be said. A certain kind of revolutionary sentimentality might wish to preserve Münzenberg's memory—first smeared, then all but obliterated by Stalin—for the Leninist paradise lost of the Zimmerwald left and the glory days in Zurich. And much in Münzenberg is very sympathetic. Even after he had become a passionate anti-Communist, Koestler retained a certain affection for his days with Willi. And it is true that toward the end of his life Münzenberg did, slowly, with the caution of a man dismantling a bomb, disengage himself step by meticulous step from the apparatus. He had seen that apparatus turn upon his closest associates and murder them, and he knew perfectly well that eventually it would destroy him too, unless he did something, something very shrewd, to save himself. In Paris during the phony war, he guarded himself using all his skill. Stalin's band of elite assassins, the Bureau of Special Tasks, watched him. The Gestapo watched him. British intelligence, riddled with Soviet agents, watched him. Willi watched them watch, protecting himself until June 1940, when things fell apart, and he was fleeing south through France, toward the valley of the Isère, and his last day.

But was Münzenberg's end suicide or murder? I am uncertain. The logic of my uncertainty runs something like this. *If* Willi did not commit suicide, he was certainly murdered. *If* he was murdered, he was almost certainly murdered by the NKVD, or by the NKVD assisted by the Nazis. Moreover, though there is a plausible case to be made for suicide, Münzenberg was in no way a saturnine or melancholic man, and nobody among his close associates has ever been able to accept that he could take his own life. His situation on June 21, 1940, was desperate, but not impossible. With really determined effort, he might well have escaped from France. In truth, every single person who was in flight with him, without exception, did reach safety, and reached it fairly soon.

Still, at that moment in 1940, Münzenberg understood that he was peculiarly on his own. He knew his escape from France, and his future wherever he went, would be shadowed by the secret services of two lethal dictators, both of whom wanted him dead. Here is where suicide seems possible. A certain kind of very dynamic person, cornered, may refuse even at the last to surrender control, and in that defiance may take things firmly back into his own hands, albeit for the last time.

Suicide or murder? Whether Münzenberg died in defiant despair, or was killed cornered, he died the victim of what he had helped create.

It was October by the time the corpse was found. The leaves were falling fast, though they had not covered over Willi's decomposing body when it was discovered by the dogs of some autumn hunters. The rope that had held him to the oak tree probably broke quite soon: when the corpse was discovered it was in a sitting position, knees up, under the tree. There was no money on his person, but a valuable watch was on his arm. In his pockets was a postcard addressed to Babette, a letter on the letterhead of the Paris PEN Club, and some papers that could not be distinguished.

The men who found the body raced to the mairie in St. Marcellin to report their discovery, but before they did, while the hunting dogs yelped and whined around their gruesome find, each man clipped a small piece of the rope from around the corpse's neck. This was peasant wisdom. For some reason, it was thought that a scrap of rope from the neck of a hanged man brings hunters' luck.

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Ever so true: Willa Cather & T. G. Masaryk

by Dennis Halac

Every year, usually in late winter, the New York novelist would write a letter to the great man. Whether hand-written or dictated and typed, the message was boldly signed, then sealed and addressed to the Czech Consulate at 1440 Broadway. From there it would be carried by special messenger to the Embassy in Washington, where it was pouched direct to Prague for the personal attention of the Founder-President himself. Upon opening the envelope, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk would find the familiar embossed initials on the letterhead —WSC. Willa Sibert Cather had written another letter.

Scholars have known for years that there was an extensive correspondence between Cather and Masaryk. She refers to it in a letter to a lifelong friend in 1945, suggesting that it was one of the most meaningful she had had with public figures. Until recently, no one had seen any part of the correspondence save for one letter of Masaryk to Cather in 1932, quoted in a 1983 biography by Phyllis Robinson but then lost again. Lately five Cather letters were found in an archive in Prague.

In a lifetime of daily writing, Cather wrote over ten thousand letters, but she had such a fear of those letters being set in the permanence of type that barely a thousand survive. When close friends predeceased her, she made every effort to retrieve whatever of her letters might survive. She beseeched friends to destroy her letters, and she herself, or her literary executor at her death, lit a great "bonfire of the vanities" in which the major part of her correspondence was forever destroyed. Hence, it is always an event when a new trove of Cather letters is found, particularly when they shed light on her life and work.

Cather went to Europe frequently but never visited Bohemia or Czechoslovakia. In the years of her fame, she reserved her travel energies for France and the locations of her novels in North America. Her year was a seasonal journey whose anchor was Greenwich Village up to 1928, then Park Avenue to her death in 1947. It included, in pleasing regularity, summers spent at a primitive cottage on Grand Manan Island off Nova Scotia, autumns in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and spring visits to the Great Plains, the Southwest, and California, the latter when much of her family settled there. Overseas trips were less common but she spent six to eight months at a time in France in the Twenties and Thirties. Cather's interest in Czechoslovakia seems restricted utterly to the Bohemians, as Czechs were then called, she met in and near Red Cloud, Nebraska, where she grew up from the age of nine. Specifically, she was a close friend of Annie Pavelka, the prototype of Antonia Shimerda, the heroine of her most famous novel, *My Antonia*. Annie, though born in Bohemia and speaking with an accent all her life, never went back to her home country, de-

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spite a specific invitation from Masaryk himself. She remained content with some prints he sent through Cather and a set of Bohemian dishes which Cather gave her as a gift.

The Bohemians of Nebraska were among the territory's earliest immigrants. The Cather family came from Virginia in 1883 but a whole generation of Bohemian-Americans had been there since the Civil War. With their immigrants from Germany, Scandinavia, and other parts of Europe, the counties of the Great Plains were as variegated and ethnic as the lower districts of Manhattan. After 1890, when the days of free land and homesteading were over, the majority of Bohemian immigrants would make their new lives in developing urban areas. Masaryk himself was a generation older than Cather and as a young swain on his way to the Garrigue household in Brooklyn probably met characters very much like Antonia Shimerda and Anton Rosicky on the Atlantic crossing.

The Czechs and other Eastern Europeans had a deeper interest in Cather. Her books were translated into both Czech and Slovak within a few years of their American editions. *My Antonia*, an obvious choice, was translated several times; there are four variant titles listed in the National Library in Prague. Naturally, her fame was greatest during the inter-war years, when Czechoslovakia was democratic and totally open to Western ideas. However, her writings were never repressed during the Communist era, even if her books were not part of any curriculum. Most Czechoslovakian students of English literature were exposed to her work, and many children continued to read *My Antonia* and *O Pioneers!* in their native languages as exotic literature of the settling of the American continent.

Thomas G. Masaryk was the first man of letters to be elected President of Czechoslovakia. Already sixty-eight when independence was declared, Masaryk had developed a number of reputations: as a philosopher, as a teacher, as a politician, and as a literary critic. Although Czech politics remained fractured and troubled throughout the Twenties and Thirties, Masaryk remained a unifying force for all the conflicting ethnic groups within the nation until his retirement in 1935. Indeed, his influence continued until his death in 1937, through his selection of Eduard Beneš as his successor. Masaryk's son, Jan, was a diplomat and, after the war, Foreign Minister in the ill-fated government that acceded to Communism in 1948. Eventually, in an incident now referred to as the Third Defenestration of Prague, he was fatally shot from a window of the Czernin Palace.

Masaryk's interest in Cather may well have preceded any publication of her work in Czech. Masaryk was a gifted linguist familiar with the literatures of a half dozen languages and was himself particularly keen on American literature. He met and married an American, Charlotte Garrigue of Brooklyn, and spent a good part of his courtship in the United States. Later, he traveled and lectured extensively in the United States both as a professor of philosophy under the sponsorship of the University of Chicago and as a political advocate for an independent Czechoslovakia. *My Antonia* was published just three weeks before the creation of the Czechoslovak nation, which was announced on November 14, 1918. It is probable then that the Cather–Masaryk correspondence began sometime soon after.

All together five letters to Masaryk have been found for the years 1923, 1925, probably 1928, 1932, and 1935. The first is really a long note, the next two are typed, single-spaced pages (Cather dictated correspondence but never her literary output), and the last two letters are hand-written, running three to five pages in her characteristic narrow, hasty penmanship. Cather's letters, unlike her fiction and essays, were rarely revised. These letters contain numerous errata, some corrected by pen in the typescript, others crossed out. She substitutes words and makes numerous spelling errors in addition to exercising an eccentric preference for archaic spelling (she insisted on "Neighbour Rosicky" with Knopf, her publisher, for example). The result is a correspondence that

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comes straight from the heart, striving like her literary work to be true, filled with insight and warmth, tingling with suggestions, and yet keeping some distance for her art.

In her Final Will and Testament, Cather placed many restrictions on the posthumous publication of her work, forbidding, for example, paperback editions of her books or reprints in anthologies. She also expressed her desire that all correspondence between her and others be destroyed and that nothing that had not already been published be printed. With the exception of Yehudi Menuhin, whose letters from Cather were reprinted in his memoirs, all Cather friends and scholars have respected her wishes. Those wishes will also be honored here: the five letters to Masaryk are paraphrased, not directly quoted.[1]

Cather's first letter is dated December 1, 1923. It is the shortest of the five, being really only a 123-word note attached to the gift of her latest book, the collection of essays called *Not Under Forty*. She thinks that Masaryk would be interested in the essay titled "148 Charles Street," which outlines her friendship with Mrs. James T. Fields, the literary doyenne of Boston and longtime-widow of the publisher of the New England Transcendentalists. It was at the Fields home that Cather met Sarah Orne Jewett, the Maine writer who would become her mentor and inspiration to a literary career. Perhaps Cather felt Masaryk's affinity with nineteenth-century standards of taste and literature would have been compatible with Mrs. Fields's. Cather then launches into a wistfulness of her own about the world before 1914, when a traveler was torn by so many choices across a map which had fewer borders than in 1923. The note ends with gratefulness for his previous letters, in which he had praised her work.

By 1925, Cather is writing Masaryk in a much more friendly vein even as she begins her letter with a very formal salutation, ending with Honored Sir. She thanks him for some form of tribute she has received, and it may be at this time that the prints were given to Annie Pavelka by Masaryk through the agency of Cather. She wishes he could meet the family of the real Antonia. She mentions spending the previous Christmas with them and taking six of the twelve Pavelka children in a car to see the silent movie version of *A Lost Lady*.

She does not mention her aversion to both motion pictures and cars—the second version of *A Lost Lady* in 1936 so disturbed her that she wrote a codicil to her will outlawing any form of dramatization or recording of her work, an injunction overcome only as the copyrights have entered the public domain. As for automobiles, they are frequently symbols of decadent progress in her stories and she herself used a horse and buggy on visits to Red Cloud into the Twenties. Her love-hate attitude toward the Middle West is reflected in a paragraph in which she claims that the contrasts and size are so enormous there that one cannot make generalizations, one can only write about an individual experience.

Apparently, Masaryk has asked for her biographical information but, true to form, she declines any real comment other than a publicity release prepared by Knopf and an old photograph from the same source. She discounts her brief life as a novelist and suggests it is too early to publish a biography, perhaps later when her lifework is finished. At the moment she is still trying to improve her style even after twelve years of writing. A direct and pure method of presentation is very difficult even when one knows the subject well. Cather says that biographies are written at the end of a writer's career, and hers still has some time to go.

1 Facsimiles and transcriptions will be placed in the Willa Cather Historical Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska, the premier archive for Cather study, and the Masaryk Collection at the University of California at Berkeley. I wish to thank here the Masaryk Institute in Prague, which holds the original letters, for its kind permission to make these copies available. Among the institute's staff, I wish to thank especially the director, Dr. Jaroslav Opat, and, for her direct assistance, Dr. Dagmar Svihlová.

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A letter dated only February 12 cannot have been written before 1928 since it refers to the publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which was published in the fall of 1927. Since the letter she is answering is in response to his reading the novel, we can assume that 1928 is the year. As is now well known, Cather admits that her novel is based on the true story of two French missionaries, Jean Baptiste Lamy, who became the first Archbishop of Santa Fe, and his good friend, Joseph Priest Machebeuf, the first Bishop of Denver. Her source for their lives was an obscure diocesan biography of Machebeuf published in Colorado in 1908. All of this information had been published in an article she wrote for *Commonweal* in 1927, and she encloses a copy of this article in the letter.

The letter dated September 23, 1932, discusses *Obscure Destinies*, a collection of three long stories. Of these, one would expect her to recommend "Neighbour Rosicky"—her most famous short work on the Bohemians of Nebraska—but instead she urges Masaryk to read "Old Mrs. Harris." She says it rings more true than the Quebec story she sent him the year before. That would refer to *Shadows on the Rock*, her prize-winning novel about seventeenth-century Quebec City. She seems to denigrate the novel in favor of the short story because the first came out of research and a sense of civilization while the latter came out of lived experience. Cather published her first novel in middle age, but she had been writing and publishing since her university days as a teenager. Her earliest models for writing were such writers as Flaubert and James, and, like them, she wanted to write stories of grand significance and civilized values. Her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, set in Canada and Europe, reflected this attitude, which was soon abandoned for the long series of works about the Great Plains and the Southwest. *Shadows* represents a return to that earlier ambition. It is a successful work, to be sure, but one about which, at least in this letter, she seems to harbor doubts.

One of the issues that haunted Cather in her later years was a belief on the part of many of her readers that she was or had become a Catholic. It was a coincidence that so many of her characters were Catholic; they merely reflected the historical truth of the times and the places she wrote about. In fact, the Baptist-born Cather did not practice religion in childhood or young adulthood, although later she joined the Episcopal Church in Red Cloud as a non-resident adult and supported the local parish until the end of her life. She denies Masaryk's suggestion that she had become a Catholic, but she admits a long admiration of the early Catholic missionaries in North America.

She encloses a copy of her letter to Connecticut Governor Wilbur Cross, previously a professor at Yale and later its president. He had written an admiring review of *Shadows* for the *Saturday Review*, and she made the rare allowance of having her private correspondence printed in the *Saturday Review* to answer some of his questions about her sources for the novel. This letter was published in 1932. She thinks the French Catholic missionaries were singular in that they brought a kind of culture and a way of living, not just a religion, to the New World. Their legacy endures, Cather remarks, at least in Canada.

She closes the letter to Masaryk with a moving thank you for his kind words about her work. She has the courage to remark that her novels and stories might have caught his attention because there was something true and rooted in them. Toward that end she was willing to be ever so little if she could be ever so true.

Her next letter, written on Valentine's Day, 1935, continues the thought of the 1932 letter. She takes great solace in his words of interest and then connects this thought to the world situation in 1935, a rare political reflection by the inward-looking and conservative novelist. It is not out of character. She finds public opinion reactionary, that is, without roots or background. She sums up the mentality of the masses with a line from *Macbeth*: "nothing is but is not." In this age of renouncing the past, she finds value

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in the sympathy of a few friends, of which she considers Masaryk one. He is one of a half-dozen heads of state who wrote to her over the years, but none of them, save he, remains in power. The rest are in jail or in exile. She notes that Switzerland and the United States have benefited from the flight of scholars because there is nowhere else for them to go.

Masaryk did not live to see the tragedy of Munich, much less the years of Nazi occupation and Communist dictatorship. Before he died he set up the Masaryk Institute to continue the encouragement of his political and philosophical principles, not only in Czechoslovakia but in the world. Toward that end, he donated seventy thousand volumes of his personal library, including all the first editions of Cather, to the Institute. Today the Institute continues, weakened by the years of oppression and interference, rising three times since its foundation only to face now an aggrieved economy and a fractured archive in which books and papers are stored in several locations in and outside of Prague. Recently recompensated owners are threatening to destroy materials they no longer wish stored on their property.

Finding the materials proved to be an interesting sidebar to the Velvet Revolution. In 1992, I had decided to become a volunteer English teacher for six months and I was assigned to central Slovakia, about eight hundred kilometers from Prague. Upon arriving in the country, I went directly to Prague and to the American cultural attaché, who, true to his kind around the world, had no clue or was unwilling to share his knowledge of Czech cultural resources. It was only through a chance meeting with a doctor in Banska Bystrica in central Slovakia whose wife was an archivist that I was given an address for the Masaryk Institute in Prague. Unfortunately, the archivist's sources were terribly out of date and the letter was delayed as it traveled from deserted office to deserted office along the Vltava River. Finally, I received word that some letters were available and were being kept at the Military History Archives, but I discovered that it will be decades before they are properly catalogued.

Willa Cather was unquestionably one of the greatest writers America has produced. Academic interest in her work has increased dramatically in the last two decades, much of it a by-product of graduate-school feminism. A bibliography of her output, and of critical writing about it, fills an entire book published ten years ago; another such volume could now be prepared. Of the spate of biographies written in the last decade, the 1987 study by James Woodress is the most authoritative and literary. Yet despite all this increased scholarly activity, Cather has seemed largely unknown to the average intelligent reader. Indeed, few outside Nebraska ever read her as part of their high-school or college literary curriculum. Many common readers still mistakenly regard her as a regional novelist despite the geographical variety of her stories, greater than Faulkner's, ranging from the plains to Mexico to Quebec. That she has been taken up and championed by today's tenure-track feminists may be a fate worse than obscurity.

Gradually, however, the general public *is* rediscovering Cather. When I gave a lecture in California to a group of middle-aged readers, they were amazed that they had ignored her for so long. To them she seemed like a breath of fresh literary air. A professor of literature at a distinguished American university was in the audience and responded when one of the readers wondered why Cather was not being assigned to undergraduates. He said that she does not fit into the potted political beliefs of most literature departments. Cather was concerned with the past and the future, she was not present-minded, and that will never hold her in good standing with literary faddists or slaves to political correctness. Yet to her own view of literature, as her correspondence mirrors, she remains ever so true.

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Art the Quattrocento fashioned

by Creighton Gilbert

Midway through his great poem "Among School Children," Yeats turns his eye away from the children to the mental image of a woman with whom he had long ago shared intense experience. Imagining how her face might look now, he first asks "Did Quattrocento finger fashion it?" then describes it in terms that show he has Botticelli in mind: "Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat." Either the Venus at her *Birth* or the spring nymph in the *Primavera*, both forcefully windblown, would fit. The poem appeared in 1928. But the source of the image is the writer's youth in the 1890s, when Botticelli had a high vogue among English writers and artists, the latter including such varied recyclers of his forms as Burne-Jones and Beardsley. Such a vogue was a great revaluation, for Botticelli had been largely ignored in the centuries since he fell out of favor in his own later years, around 1500. This was consistent with the pattern in which early Renaissance art was then elbowed out of the way by the modernism of Leonardo and Raphael; that fall in turn reflected the general conviction that art, like science, progresses. The Victorian revival of the Quattrocento reflected a new aestheticism, the view that art does not in the end matter in the world but is one of its happier phenomena.

The Quattrocento revival proved enduring. Botticelli is still with us, even if the taste for him has largely retreated from artists' attention to a diffuse middlebrow sentiment. Today's artists are more interested in other fifteenth-century artists, especially Piero della Francesca, which suggests the wide range the era can offer. In 1892, when the four-hundredth anniversary of his death might have been marked, Piero was not yet widely familiar, though avant-garde artists, most obviously Seurat, saw the power of the kind of forms he made. In 1992, however, the name had such resonance that the celebrations for Piero rivaled those mounted for Mozart.

The most widespread token of the vogue for Piero, and also the cheapest (intellectually, not financially), is the number of books about him issued during his anniversary year. As a group, they are depressing. It is understandable that publishers hoped to capitalize on the extra attention accorded Piero on this occasion, but most of the books offered pretty much the same batch of color illustrations, which these days never are really so bad, even if they are never as good as partisans hope. (Art historians who feel that certain books have really good color seldom test their feelings directly against the originals. When they do, they are generally disappointed.) The specialist confronted by these books does not want to pay repeatedly for the same pictures, which are the chief cost in them, and so hopes the texts will have some value. But publishers commission texts from certain art historians not only because they are more or less suitable but, more im-

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portant, because they are willing to turn out something *fast*. Sometimes they can do so effectively because they have studied the issues before. (Even then, however, they usually have published their ideas already and their essays are mostly a rehash.) Often they cannot. In the case of the new books about Piero, one is by a scholar who, though he had not previously written about this painter, had done fresh and helpful work on quite different topics. He boasted that he had done the job in just four months. It shows in his errors, alas, though his book is one of the brainier ones.

The sloppy scholarship of most of these books on Piero is unluckily exposed on the first page they devote to the artist's biography. His early years are obscure, but documents in archives have recently turned up showing that he worked humbly for some eight years in his small home town assisting a rather modest painter there. He then tried his luck in Florence—at the time a thriving cultural center—and the record of this visit, during which he assisted a major painter, had until lately been the earliest fact known. The move is rightly compared to the way today a regional actor might pack his bags and head for Broadway. All the older books naturally had started with this, and went on to debate what Piero would have liked in Florence among the Renaissance productions then just emerging. What is distressing in all these books is that they still begin in this way, unaware of those eight earlier years even though they have been properly documented in the specialist journals in Italy. The texts merely rehearse obsolete conventional wisdom, salting it when possible with personal judgments or theories. The one book that can be recommended, by Ronald Lightbown, is workmanlike and thorough if not inspired.[1] The importance of those eight early years is still to be thought about, for Piero's situation was rare. So far as we know, most Renaissance artists who had great careers got started in them by age twenty or so; those who spent years as assistants almost always remained assistants.

At least three congresses commemorated the Piero year. One congress offered some seventy papers. Most of these, naturally, dealt with the artist and his work only indirectly, turning to such matters as the poetry written in a city where he worked. The numerous exhibitions also had only partial, or indirect, links to Piero. The fact that the exhibitions were scattered in many places, with no one blockbuster, reflects the simple matter of reluctance by museums to lend such precious works. The Lisbon Museum was an exception: it loaned a panel to the exhibition in Urbino. There six real Pieros could be seen, a large and rare quantity.

One exhibition opened only in 1993, when the conservationists finally finished with the single work by Piero which was its point. This, the altarpiece in Perugia, is one of the artist's most complex, and indeed odd, works. The cleaning, and the attention drawn to the work's uniquely puzzling nature, certainly justified holding the exhibition, something that quite often cannot be argued. The exhibition did, however, show the whimsicality that arises in shoehorning such an event into the givens of our time. Perugia, like many cities in Italy and elsewhere, lacks a formal exhibition venue. Most Italian cities can use some grand old building whose original function has gone, and in Perugia this building is a fortress on a hilltop at the edge of the old city, now used as a sort of entrance to a commuter bus station. Deep within the fortress, and deep within the hill, is a room made to store cannons. This is where the Piero was exhibited. It is a room without windows, and it looks like a spacious dungeon or man-made cavern, with rough vaults. On opening night, the social elite of Perugia filled this space in a tight press. Since the painting had to be floodlit with care, one could not judge whether the conservation was a success. That must wait till it returns to its normal home in the city gallery, where there is adequate light, on the top floor of the ancient town

1 *Piero della Francesca*, by Ronald Lightbown; Abbeville, 312 pages, $125.

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hall. The local paper reported that the public cost of the conservation was a bit over $116,000, and that of the exhibition was $236,000. The figures are somewhat unfair, since total costs were offset by corporate gifts and an admission fee at the door. More broadly, it is probable that such exhibitions provide the public consensus for funding the conservation and for other more serious matters.

The painting thus honored is on a many-sectioned wooden surface, two sections of which are much larger than the others. Of these, one looks like the conventional altarpiece of the time: a Madonna on a throne, with four saints and a gold background. This has often been judged inferior to other Pieros, chiefly, I think, because it does not fit our standard ideas about his work. The figures have more character and more physical presence than his usual heroes, who are typically marked by mask-like reserve and columnar strictness. Those qualities do appear in the other large section, a panel placed above the Madonna, a unique and undeniably awkward arrangement, producing a top-heavy effect. This image of the Annunciation is also among the most intense of Piero's presentations of intricate perspective, given glowing life by its high-keyed lighting. It has been argued that these panels are actually two unrelated works, later jammed together, but the findings of the conservation have refuted that idea. Were they then intended as a unity? This argument now seems to hold the field, but it is still not easy to accept. My own view (expounded in the exhibition catalogue) is that Piero first painted the standard Madonna altarpiece and the Annunciation was added later. It was made to be an addition, much as if the new annex to the Guggenheim, even though a later plan, had been done also by Wright.

The now-popular exhibition type featuring a single work, shown just after leaving the conservators' hands, was also exemplified in the Metropolitan Museum's recent exhibition of Verrocchio's bronze of Christ and St. Thomas.[2] It differed, though, in having traveled to New York after a first showing in its home city of Florence. No one argues that there was a need for this; we simply had an exhibition of the traditional kind, happily organized by curators to show a great work not otherwise available. Verrocchio (1435–1488) is far less famous than Piero (*c.* 1414–1492), and it is still necessary to explain him to the public, even in Florence, as "the teacher of Leonardo." Indeed, Verrocchio illustrates neatly the way in which the Quattrocento came to seem obsolete. In this case it is most vivid in the elaborate linear systems, which Leonardo replaced by softer blending in the cause of modernity. Yet for us Verrocchio's sculpture can work directly as a marvelous creation: its graphic vigor fuses a human moment with monumental presence.

There was also some advantage in seeing the sculpture outside its permanent site, which is one of a series of niches scooped from the outer wall of a church on a quite narrow street. The series, with its line of active saints produced over a period of a century by Renaissance sculptors from Donatello to Giovanni Bologna, is certainly the most successful program in the history of outdoor sculpture done on corporate sponsorship. Each statue was commissioned by a guild or similar commercial group, on a plan controlled by the city.

At the Met, the narrow street was replaced by a very different approach. We did not come sidelong to the work, but first saw it, straight on, from a considerable distance. Most of us recognized it from art-history textbooks as a famous icon, and so were drawn to travel the remaining distance up to it, in which we had to detour around a half circle. It was a triumph of the museum visit arranged to make a point of the importance

2 "Verrocchio's Christ and St. Thomas: a Masterpiece of Sculpture from Renaissance Florence" was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from June 16 through October 17, 1993. A catalogue, edited by Loretta Dolcini, has been published by the Met and Harry N. Abrams (125 pages, $35; $24.95 paper).

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of the monument. We did in the end arrive from the side, and the happy absence of street traffic allowed us to meditate about how Verrocchio composed the work in relation to our position. He used the two approaches, from left and from right, with the power of classic simplicity. If we stopped at a point putting us at forty-five degrees left of the sculpture, we saw one of the two figures, the Christ, in full face—a signal that we should pause since this was a main view. From the right, the corresponding point offered the other figure, St. Thomas, in pure profile. In each case we were secondarily aware of the other figure, which completed the meaning of the first. The more formal figure of Verrocchio's Christ is, in its frontality, naturally stable, an icon to be worshiped, while the more mobile Thomas performs an action, the action that gave value to his whole life: he is extending his hand to touch the wound in Christ's side. By doing this, Thomas allays his doubt that Christ has risen from the dead. We then moved on to the point directly in front of both, as the museum had suggested in its distant preview and as all photographs show. In its original setting, this comes as the ending view, where the artist undertakes a typical Renaissance task, a synergy of the fixed icon with a dramatic narrative that is built on its existence and gives it reference to common life.

Verrocchio's patrons gave him a second-hand niche, designed two generations earlier. They had bought it from the original patrons, who had lost a good deal of their status and had moved away their statue by Donatello, a depiction of a single saint. Verrocchio made the niche work for two by having Christ inside while Thomas steps up to him from a slightly wider base extending outside the niche. They relate differently to the framing arch, the active, suppliant saint outside and lower, the divine recipient of homage symmetrically haloed by the arch. Verrocchio's recycling of the one-figure niche is brilliant, even if the artist is a bit ostentatious in making sure we see his virtuosity. It is always remarked on, and is typical of him as a solver of problems, but is not quite so novel as is often stated. Another niche in the series, about the same size, contains four figures, which were in place earlier.

More interesting is the reference to another series of wall niches at the end of the same street in Florence, in the cathedral bell tower. There, fifty years before Verrocchio's commission, Donatello had installed a series of prophets, all single figures except one, Abraham. We see him with his kneeling son, the sacrificial Isaac, who is offering his neck to his father's knife. Though he is a half-size boy, and the two figures are made from one marble block rather than as two separate big bronzes, the model for Verrocchio's procedure had been offered. Prophets and saints are commonly shown with objects that identify them—visual labels, called attributes, such as Catherine's wheel. Abraham's is the boy Isaac. It would seem a bit disconcerting to say that Thomas's attribute is Christ, but the wound is. It was Thomas to whom the niche was dedicated. Not even this inclusion of Christ in Thomas's area is new. Also fifty years before in the cathedral, a series of frescoes had been painted of saints in the chapels dedicated to them; of these, only Thomas is shown with an additional figure—Christ, whose wound he is probing. (Other chapels do show two figures, but they are dedicated to two saints.) Verrocchio thus had a formula as his base, and gave it sharp realization, like a great director of a traditional play.

In some respects this became an anticlimax in the museum. One cannot blame anyone for the slightly soap-like varnish, added to protect the bronze surface after the cleaning, yet it did make the sculpture look like a copy of itself. So did the dead white copy of the niche, which looked like drywall. Oddest surely was the way the other works of art accompanying this sculpture, by way of making it a rounded exhibition, had been treated. Some educational photographs and models to demonstrate casting methods were set nearby, but the original works of art, works on paper done in Florence at the same time, a fascinating group from the

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museum's own holdings, were down in the basement. No doubt the original point was to keep them from too much light, but the result was that they are lost to awareness even by the museum authorities. Visiting the show on a Friday, one found the sculpture all right, but the gallery with the drawings was closed to visitors. Again one understands that some galleries are closed each day for budgetary reasons, but one may doubt that this has ever happened so as to separate two parts of a featured exhibition. Evidently the department that closed the rooms was not in the loop with the other one.

Though it is common to speak of "Renaissance men," there are not many actual examples of people with a vast range of expertise then other than Leonardo. One of these, however, is Francesco di Giorgio of Siena (1439–1501), a brilliant sculptor in every medium available to him: bronze, marble, terra cotta, wood. He was the most original civil and military architect of his era; his forts anticipate Michelangelo in their functional irregular shapes. He was an engineer and antiquarian scholar (his writings survive in many drafts), and an active painter in various media. His paintings even include miniatures, just as his sculptures include medals. He and Leonardo exchanged pointers about dome construction and perhaps about bronze casting. If he is not well known today, perhaps it is because of the wealth of Quattrocento talents. As an analogy from the twentieth century, one might cite, say, Rogier de la Fresnaye: both he and Francesco were distinctive and original talents, in at the start of trends, yet likely to be dropped even from college courses for lack of time. Such artists seem to merit exhibitions more than most, to help viewers register their qualities, and even more so when they are so varied.

Siena recently gave Francesco di Giorgio a two-part exhibition, again in odd venues. The architectural part was in the basement of the city hall, in the so-called salt-storage rooms; the rest was in a former church. The architecture show did not communicate well; oddly, in view of its nature, it was even hard to decide what the intended traffic route was. Besides photographs and models, especially of the boldly shaped forts, and facsimiles of his manuscripts with drawings, there were many labels. But it was only effective for someone who already knew the works, which is not easy. Some of the works are more famous than the artist. One example is the central-plan Church of the Calcinaio in Cortona, which is a great point of creative space-making in architectural history. Others are parts of complexes shared with other designers—the Ducal Palace of Urbino, for instance—and the forts themselves are remote when not ruined. The very good scholars who planned this show could have used help from some people oriented to pedagogy.

In the former church, the traffic worked well by simply adopting the traditional tourist-visiting system, up one side of the nave and down the other. Well-spaced installations gave us constant lively surprises, not only in the many media and themes of the artist but in complementary works by his contemporaries. Donatello was splendidly represented by a rarely seen relief from a country hospital and by his grand bronze John the Baptist, in better light here than in Siena cathedral, its home. The frescoes by Francesco for this church do not survive. But one could see in the chapel where they once were figures by his collaborator on the project, no less a master than Signorelli, in the black-and-white specialty which he evolved for works designed to be modest accompaniments to grander images. The humanism of Francesco himself appeared not only in his classical explorations and in the mythical narratives of many of his paintings but also in his approach to surfaces; they are rich in small vibrancies, giving the figures both a luminous glitter and a vulnerable nervousness. The constant shifting-around of the artist from one kind of work to another proved to have a powerful unity of assertion, a proof of the validity of such an exhibition.

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Poems
by C. H. Sisson, Sandra McPherson, Bill Manhire & Bibhu Padhi

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In the silence

The silence of my days
Deepens, the wind is still:
Unbroken cloud or haze
Wraps up the world until
The minds which once seemed full
Seem empty, dark and dull.

I speak, and no one hears:
I listen, no one speaks.
There is no sound of tears,
No laughter. No one seeks
The future in the past
Where it must come at last.

And is the future new?
They say so, who ignore
Adam and Eve show through
Today as heretofore.
The murder done by Cain
Is daily done again.

Celebrate if you will
The triumph of your genes:

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The past is working still
—That is all that it means.
In every spoken word,
Always, the past is heard.

Perhaps silence is best,
But if there must be speech,
Then watch it closely, lest
It stretches out of reach.
The future is too far:
The past is all we are.

—*C. H. Sisson*

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Path through the rhododendron and azalea test gardens twenty years ago

Pink widgeons, like a housewife's cloths
smeared with silver polish,
whistle for luck, low across ripples.

"I don't want to be married to you," a voice says
out of a big white rhododendron.
It is no burning bush.

"I said I'm sorry,"—
he is hidden behind some blue
azaleas I wish would grow from my hands.

Hail rules lines across a springwater lake.
I press my back against a tree: Shelter me.
There is a strange mallard with a tuft like his mind

working inside out. Whole flowers
are descending with the storm.
My daughter says,

"You have ice in your hair."
Yet my hands are burning in my burnoose.
I watch cruising duck marriages break up

on the small unlevel beaten sea.
Even she and I write our names on a leaf.
Wind loses it in a whorl of nameless leaves.

It is not enough, to fill up the world:
We must allow *this* leaf its attachment to *that* shore,
and wind its commitment to transport.

Dreaming now of the park, wronged hearts everywhere,
you know if you were there
it would cheer you.

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Still, if you are unhappy,
you do not wish to explore your unhappiness as if it were
everyone's free afternoon in the park.

Free hearts are bound as roots, resin sets out
like a toy sailboat down the pine,
and the protection from a sudden shower

is spruce needle fences or the millinery
of a dogwood.
I tell my daughter: True, it is cold, but go out there,

stand on the low footbridge and throw bread.
Next sunny day the city workers,
who get along or who do not,

who believe it's beautifying and right to fix this scene,
will come to the bridge rail,
paint all the cut initials over with green.

—*Sandra McPherson*

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Some screens

Japanese Pavilion, Los Angeles County Museum

Palace scene in downtown L.A.
Palace scene in a snowy landscape,
spring cherry, autumn maple.

We stand for a while and watch the snow:
the bridge at Uji crossing from spring to winter
each day since the seventh century.

The calligrapher walks in the country
in the golden age of Japanese screen painting.
Nowhere to sit, just the slow, cool spiral,

carp on a hanging scroll,
plum trees and pine, the privileged light
turning gold in the distance

while guards guard the water.
Look, there's a phoenix. And at last
someone's sweeping away the leaves,

the one happy man at the shrine . . .
Such heat! Such snow! Such terrible
traffic! And there's the sad poet

still locked in the palace,
alone on the fan, a small breeze
that once touched the lady.

—Bill Manhire

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Small wants, again

for Tess Gallagher

The wants have dwindled
to a short sequence of things
that happen, today.
The cover page of my first book
that I had stuck to the wall,
has come off and is hanging
in all its helplessness.
Books and papers have
accumulated at the places
where I left them.
Dust has gathered
on every little object
that I didn't carry,
because I wanted them to stay
where they did.

The doorbell rings still,
but the guests belong to others.
There's no need
to lie on the reed mat
on our first-floor verandah.
I may not ask for things, but
wait for things to come
at the time someone
calls out my name.
I do go out, but rarely visit
the shop which once sold
delicate and crisp *vadās*.
They have been a part of my absence.

Once or twice I've looked around
the room, which still is mine,
but the fading color of the wall

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forces me to look away.
Although, I know where things are
or should be, sometimes
longing for my touch,
my way of telling them
that I shall return
sooner than they think.
I touch, with my doubting fingers,
the keys on the typewriter.

These days I stay away from
things that once were mine,
think of which other way
they could be remembered
where I stay, at this new place.
Today, I still write letters,
but each letter struggles
for its fulfillment more and more.
I remember only the places
where I once used to lose
my anxiety and myself.
I still wait for letters.
And as the short Indian day
draws to a close, in the dark room,
my younger child, his voice
as rapturous as a bird's in its nest,
asks me questions I cannot answer.

—Bibhu Padhi

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Art

Miracle at the Met

by Jed Perl

Corot's paintings have a room of their own in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's new galleries for nineteenth-century painting and sculpture, and it's one of the most beautifully designed and installed galleries that you will see in any New York City museum today. While often small in size, Corot's paintings invariably have a grand internal scale, and the Metropolitan's straightforward, four-square presentation is the perfect setting in which to appreciate Corot's gift for discovering the extraordinary logic of an ordinary world. That's the key to Corot, out of which flows the full complex glory of his art: the hard-edged early Italian views, the dappled silvery late French ones, the austere and mysterious figure studies, even the odd, challenging essays in Salon-scale religious painting. There are other galleries in the Metropolitan's new installation that are just about as perfect as the Corot room: the Cézanne room, the Monet room, and the gallery containing the smaller paintings by Courbet. In some of the other galleries, where several major artists share a space, the installation isn't quite as effective. But the problems that appear to have arisen and remained unresolved are ones that are inherent in the situation of installing a great collection in a limited space while keeping in mind the tastes and priorities of a disparate public. At no point does one feel that the curator in charge is taking the work less seriously than it deserves or is confusing matters by treating works of art as cultural artifacts. The next month or so, when the new galleries are full of first-time visitors, may not be the right time to appreciate all that has been accomplished—the galleries are simply too crowded. But as time goes on and the crowds thin out, it will be easy to see that, despite some questionable decisions about placement and what may be an excess of decorative moldings, good sense has prevailed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gary Tinterow, the Engelhard Curator of European Paintings at the Met, and David Harvey, the Senior Exhibition Designer, have given the paintings and sculpture their due. That may not sound like a lot, but considering how little account museums now take of the inherent qualities of the works that have been placed in their trust, this installation is close to being miraculous.

Most of what we see going on in contemporary museums leaves us unprepared for something as direct and uncomplicated as this installation. In the museum world, change is matter-of-factly assumed to be good, and the very idea of the museum in flux has come to be one of the subjects that the museum presents to the public. The Metropolitan has been immersed in this process of perpetual change for years now, going so far as to make the various older elements of its own building a subject of ironic architectural juxtapositions. The most recent of these juxtapositions can be viewed as one approaches the print and drawing galleries on the way to the new nineteenth-century

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galleries, for there is a window through which one looks down from the second floor into the Petrie Sculpture Court on the first. This court has as its north wall one of the Renaissance Revival brick walls of the Met's 1888 building, while its south wall is a piece of phony classical architecture finished just the other day, and its roof is a composition in steel and glass that, in the context, looks like phony modernism. It's an exercise in stylistic relativism that crushes the works, mostly seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European sculpture, that it was designed to display. The Petrie court is an interior that celebrates change for change's sake, and its effect is one of incoherence. At the Metropolitan, for twenty years, they've been pursuing a master plan that institutionalizes incoherence, that does not serve works of art, and that is not, even leaving aside the works it is meant to serve, distinguished architecture. Thus there has certainly been a need for change at the Met, and if Gary Tinterow has been concerned, in the paperback book published on the occasion of the reinstallation of the nineteenth-century galleries,[1] to present this new installation as just one more change in an ongoing process, one can figure that he's attempting to pass off his radical traditionalism as business-as-usual.

When the Met's previous nineteenth-century installation, the Andre Meyer Galleries, opened in 1980, the formidable architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable pronounced it "near-perfect." I can't imagine what she was thinking of. The Meyer's open-plan design left paintings to float aimlessly through space. No doubt Huxtable's reaction supports Philippe de Montebello's assertion, in the foreword to the new picture book, that "Everyone was at first dazzled by the expanse of space and by its airiness and, of course, by the multiple vistas onto so many Impressionist pictures." "Everyone" is an exaggeration. Right from the start some artists believed that the galleries were a disaster. They were arguing that discrete rooms would be far more appropriate; they knew instinctively what de Montebello says everyone figured out "in the end," namely, that "the galleries proved confusing." It is on the former site of the open-plan Meyer Galleries that the new galleries have been erected, and in looking back at what has now luckily been demolished, Tinterow makes the bland historicist remark that "one can see that flexibility was the key concept in museum design of the 1970s." He also quotes Philip Johnson, the man who has an architectural theory for any season, as remarking at a symposium in 1985: "That modern architecture thing—with movable partitions—is gone. We're over that, over, over." That's a nice way to say that the Meyer Galleries, in which paintings were treated like lots in an auction house, was a fiasco from day one. The paintings never looked comfortable in that awful space. And if Tinterow has to present this veneer of historical relativism to please his colleagues, I nevertheless presume that he knows what we know, namely, that the new installation is basically right and the old installation was fundamentally, conceptually wrong. In the museum world, even fiascos are regarded as of historical interest, but no matter: in this instance change has been for the good. Now we need to persuade the Metropolitan to leave this installation in place more or less forever.

Gary Tinterow and David Harvey have thought long and hard about the problems involved in creating galleries that have a period feeling without looking like postmodern amusements. Tinterow explains that one of the models to which he and Harvey referred was John Russell Pope's designs for the old West Building of the National Gallery in Washington, "where visitors are induced to leave the central corridors for suites of galleries." While Tinterow cannot come out and say it, the very act of taking the National Gallery's old building as a model that is preferable to the Gallery's I. M. Pei-designed East Building suggests that Tin-

1 *The New Nineteenth-Century European Paintings and Sculpture Galleries*, by Gary Tinterow; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 88 pages, $12.95 paper.

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terow and his colleagues are in revolt against the aesthetic that has dominated museum design for decades now. He says that he and his colleagues had "hoped we could make the new galleries appear as if they had been designed and built by McKim, Mead, and White at the turn of the century." As they went on, they "recognized that the decoration of the new galleries would be best approached not through imitation or pastiche but by returning to the sources used by the Beaux-Arts architects: Vignola and Palladio." He goes on to say that "In giving these rooms a classical appearance, we rejected the Post-Modern approach to historical ornament. We did not feel obliged to enlarge moldings or otherwise distort the classical canon in order to remind viewers that the Modern movement had severed ties with the past." This is a daring approach, and it has pretty sound results. The colors of the walls —butterscotch, moss green, slate blue— may feel a bit strong on first encounter, but I do not think that they're too strong, and with time they may well come to look like the most natural thing in the world. I do however feel that, despite all Tinterow's careful thinking, there are more decorative elements than are absolutely necessary, especially around the doors in the Manet room, where I get a whiff of Pop Victoriana (but perhaps this too will turn out to be only a first impression). There's also something a little bit heavy-handed about the cases that hold the sculpture, especially the works by Degas. There's just too much dark wood; it gives the unwanted ambience of an Edwardian men's club.

The problem of how to integrate the Annenberg Collection, an anticipated bequest which is currently slated to spend six months a year at the Met, has been handled about as well as is possible, given the collectors' insistence that the paintings be displayed as a unit in discrete galleries. The Hon. and Mrs. Annenberg's collection has been hung in such a way that their Van Goghs, for example, are in close proximity to the Van Goghs in the Met's own collection. This rather graceful accommodation of the hubris of the collectors suggests that old-fashioned rooms have their own kind of flexibility. It may actually be the case that small discrete galleries allow for greater flexibility and variability in hanging than the old movable walls (which, as de Montebello points out, rarely ended up being moved anyway). Certainly the quasi-integration of the Annenberg Collection into the nineteenth-century galleries is a great advance over the bleak isolation of the Lehman Collection. *The Princess of Broglie*, Ingres's blue porcelain phantom, would look wonderful in the new rooms of nineteenth-century painting but remains marooned in the nowhereland that is the Lehman wing. And the presence in the Annenberg Collection (and thus in the nineteenth-century galleries) of significant works by twentieth-century masters such as Braque, Matisse, and Bonnard makes for some interesting juxtapositions. It's a little like some of the juxtapositions of historically disparate but conceptually related works that are so much fun to discover in the Phillips Collection in Washington.

In a few cases, in the new galleries great paintings are not given enough space. Perhaps because Seurat has been left to share a room with that all-time crowd pleaser Van Gogh, the Seurats have been somewhat shunted aside. The *Circus Sideshow*, in which everything you ever needed to know about a bustling nineteenth-century city is presented in the form of a dusky shadow play, is hung anticlimactically, on a small wall between a corner and a doorway. The same miserable treatment is accorded the Met's study for the *Grande Jatte*. These paintings need more space than they're getting here; and they may well get it when the Annenberg paintings take their (temporary) leave of the Met (which, according information available at press time, could be as early as next month). Perhaps fewer would agree that Gary Tinterow has blundered in hanging the Met's late Renoir portrait, of the actress Tilla Durieux, in a corner rather than in the middle of the wall. Late Renoir remains one of the least appreciated of modern styles (that Matisse and Picasso admired these

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works tremendously seems not to matter to anybody), but there ought to be a better presentation of this portrait, in which the German actress's open, smiling face and beautiful strong arms add up to a great theatrical performance that is accomplished without her even getting up from her chair. It is also troublesome that Courbet's larger paintings are hung in what ends up functioning as an anteroom to the Manets; but at least Courbet is treated better than he was in the old installation, where he was presented as hallway art. And the Metropolitan's holdings in the earlier nineteenth century, though they will never have the depth and coherence of the post-1850 collections, do look good, having been immeasurably enriched in recent years by the addition of works by Gericault, Købke, and some others.

As for the problem of what to do with the late-nineteenth-century Salon paintings, I'd say that Tinterow has handled this pretty well too. The new galleries are entered by means of a long gallery that runs the entire length of the complex and functions as a corridor linking the Greek and Middle Eastern area and the Islamic wing with the galleries for prints and drawings and the entrance to the twentieth-century wing. This space has been handled as a sort of grand salon. Tinterow says that it is inspired by the Grande Galerie of the Louvre, but the truth is probably that it was inspired by the central main-floor aisle at the Musée d'Orsay (which was itself, I suppose, partly based on the Louvre gallery). Like the Musée d'Orsay space, this long space is an entry point and a point of orientation. It's also an infinite improvement over the Orsay, both architecturally and in terms of the work that it contains. The more saccharine of nineteenth-century sculpture has been kept to a minimum. By emphasizing sculpture by Barye and Rodin, Tinterow has underlined the important idea that work with avant-garde implications can also have academic connections. The paintings by Puvis de Chavannes further emphasize this point. Cabanel's portrait of Catharine Lorillard Wolfe, who was among the early supporters of the museum, is a brilliant choice, because in its dry honesty it underlines a kind of thing that academic artists can do really well. It's unfortunate that Tinterow has hung not only Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair* but also Bastien-Lepage's *Joan of Arc* and the rest of the usual academic-kitsch suspects, but the crowds of the 1990s love them for the same reason that the crowds did when they were first exhibited, and who is going to argue with the box office? In his essay on the rehanging, Tinterow is glad to point out that for decades now some people have been reviving salon art and other people have been decrying the revival as philistinism, but the fact that this has gone on for a long time doesn't say anything about who's right and who's wrong. In any event, it is unarguable that these paintings are a part of the history, and in moderation and in the hallway, I suppose we can accept the fact that they are here to stay.

It is significant that in thinking about how to restore order to the Metropolitan's nineteenth-century collections Gary Tinterow has, by his own account, found his mind reverting to the old West Building of the National Gallery. Tinterow may explain that he wanted to learn from Pope's sense of architectural order and flow, but I don't doubt that he also, if only unconsciously, wanted to regain for the Metropolitan some of the serenity that pervades the National Gallery's West Building even on days when the East Building is nothing but the sleekest tourist trap on earth. When the East Building is jammed with people, it can feel almost wickedly enjoyable to go over to the West Building, where the Vermeers and Titians and Poussins and Raphaels and the Leonardo and the Italian primitives and, well, just about anything else you might ever want to see, are available for virtually private viewing. In looking to the National Gallery's West Building, Tinterow is looking away from the monster museums of the 1970s and 1980s (of which the Metropolitan's new wings are one prime example and the Na-

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tional Gallery's East Building is another). The National Gallery's West Building is something else again. It is a populist institution in the best sense of the word—and maybe that's what Tinterow really wants to reinvent at the Met, the old-time cultural populism. In those West Building galleries the paintings are presented with the undramatic elegance they deserve, and over a period of time a large heterogeneous public discovers for itself what it means to rise to an occasion.

No major American museum has yet descended to the level of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, where nineteenth-century art is now treated as mere cultural archeology and great painters are put on the same plane as artisans and technicians. Even if they wanted to, the curators at the National Gallery couldn't juxtapose their paintings with silver dressing tables and maquettes for buildings for the simple reason that the National Gallery doesn't own any of that stuff. At the Metropolitan, an old-fashioned division between fine and decorative arts has stood in the way of Orsayization. What the new nineteenth-century installation makes abundantly clear is that the key to a great installation is right in front of a curator all the time; it's inherent in the spirit, both individual and collective, of the works that make up a collection. Gary Tinterow has re-established a vital connection with the collectors who built the museum's holdings, for he has honored their strong, passionate feelings for these works of art, the feelings that compelled them to give them to the public in the first place. Last spring, the Metropolitan organized a huge exhibition celebrating the Havemeyer collection, the brainchild of H. O. and Louisine Havemeyer that is responsible for the Met's strong holdings in Corot, Courbet, Degas, and Manet. At the time I found the show a little overblown, and wondered what the point was in giving a special exhibition to this work, most of which was in the Metropolitan's collection and quite familiar. But I now think that the Havemeyer show had a kind of psychological function for the Metropolitan: it was an opportunity to look inward and even perhaps consider how far off track a great museum had gone. It was also an opportunity to give some credit to two perspicacious collectors, before the collectors' personalities would again dissolve into the masterworks that they had given the people of New York City. The Annenberg holdings, which are by comparison with the Havemeyers' essentially inconsequential, are made somewhat more impressive through the way that, in the nineteenth-century galleries, the collectors' hubris disappears into the artists' genius.

Those of us who know nothing of the inner workings of the Metropolitan Museum of Art can only imagine what backroom battles, machinations, compromises, and plain hard work were involved in getting this new installation into place. To say that none of the effort shows is the greatest possible compliment that one can give to Gary Tinterow. He has done what significant curators do: he has become transparent. The nineteenth century is both the basement and the attic of modern art, which is perhaps why over the years it has been the subject of so much first-rate interpretation as well as of so many tendentious decadent interpretations. In the new installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art the nineteenth century is put in no context, the work is seen from no particular perspective, and there are no surprises. That's the surprise. After lo these many years, the paintings (and it is, in the end, mostly paintings) are being allowed to be themselves. It's amazing.

Exhibition notes

"Baudelaire's Voyages:
The Poet and His Painters"
at the Hecksher Museum, Huntington, N.Y.
August 28–November 14, 1993

This exhibition is at once fascinating and infuriating, informative and exasperating. Its premise: to chart the relationship between literature and visual art that lies at the core of Baudelaire's work. So far, so good. That the

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celebrated poet and critic believed in profound "correspondence"—his word—between the arts, between sounds, words, movements, and images is readily documented. That he was an informed observer of the art of his day is clear to anyone who has read his criticism. Yet absorbing and illuminating as that criticism often is, Baudelaire frankly declared that he valued pictures chiefly for the associations they provoked in him; the curator of the ambitious exhibition at the Hecksher Museum shares that point of view.

The show is divided into four sections, or "voyages," each, according to the copious text panels, "based on an important motif in Baudelaire's poetry": the depths, the city, the dream, the new. Each "voyage" pairs "selected poems with related sequences of visual works. In some cases the poem was directly inspired by the art, or the art by the poem; however, most of the pairings reveal correspondence, a word Baudelaire used to signify an almost mystical relationship among the arts." That is, while some pictures are by artists whose work Baudelaire knew, or who based their work on his, many examples were chosen because they evoked "Baudelairean" associations in the curator.

It's not difficult to identify the artists and even the specific works that Baudelaire knew, was affected by, and wrote about, but since borrowing the more notable examples was clearly out of the question, the show leans heavily on prints and drawings. Baudelaire worshiped Delacroix (so much that the painter is supposed to have protested), but, for obvious reasons, instead of, say, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, which directly inspired a prose poem, we are offered a group of lithographs of *Hamlet*—not Delacroix's highest achievement, alas, but Baudelaire owned a set. The exhibition's thesis is better served by first-rate works by Guys, Baudelaire's "Painter of Modern Life," by Manet, whom he admired almost as much as he did Delacroix, and by Daumier, Boudin, and others among Baudelaire's contemporaries. Sometimes the connections are incontrovertible, as in Manet's offhand drawing of his friend or a sequence documenting the choice of a frontispiece for *Les Fleurs du mal*, which brings together three works: a sixteenth-century print of a peculiar skeleton-tree; Braquemond's updated version, commissioned and rejected by Baudelaire; and a later version by Rops, which was accepted but used for another book. At times, the connections are, to put it delicately, tenuous; we are told, for example, that prints by Kirchner, Munch, and Ensor embody "the Baudelairean moment."

The show's strength lies in works by artists, not usually Baudelaire's contemporaries, who were inspired by his poetry. Among recent painters, Motherwell takes pride of place. The presence of several works by Baziotes puzzled me, although it appears that he regarded Baudelaire as an important source. More problematic and, unfortunately, more typical, was the justification for including a 1940s Rothko—a handsome watercolor with his characteristic floating "vessels" of the period: "Like Baudelaire, who in 'The Voyage' found beauty in everything that came from afar, Rothko during the 1940s searched the most distant and mythic horizons of man's history for motifs." Even if one accepts the "correspondence," certain objections arise. The same description could apply to Gottlieb, Pollock, Motherwell, David Smith, and many American artists who matured in the Forties and, like Rothko, took Jungian myth and the collective unconscious as points of departure, whether or not, like Motherwell, they were inspired by Baudelaire. Pollock *is* included, described as displaying what Baudelaire called "love of the ungraspable." Such inconsistencies are not, as one might expect, the result of having to accommodate works from the Hecksher's own collection: most of the works are borrowed.

The concept of the show ensures that works of art are subordinated to massive amounts of text. At times, as when poem actually engendered image or vice versa, having both works side-by-side is useful, even provocative. But do we need to be told that "Baudelaire did not simply appropriate

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whole images from visual art, but rather adapted and combined them, sometimes subconsciously, in the smelter of his poetic imagination"? And ending with a bland color photograph of I. M. Pei's pyramid in the Louvre courtyard, as a "realization" of the prismatic, reflective surfaces of Baudelaire's poem "Parisian Dream," seems, to say the least, excessively literal.

"Baudelaire's Voyages" was organized by Jeffrey Coven, Professor of English at Suffolk Community College in Selden, New York. It will travel to the Archer M. Huntington Gallery at the University of Texas, Austin (January 21–March 13, 1994). A catalogue by Professor Coven, with an essay by Dore Ashton, has been published by Bulfinch Press/Little, Brown (183 pages, $27.95).

—*Karen Wilkin*

"John James Audubon: The Watercolors for 'The Birds of America'" at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
October 3, 1993–January 2, 1994

The man as artist, rather than as naturalist, is the focus of this splendid exhibition of works by John James Audubon (1785–1851), drawn from the collection of the New-York Historical Society. It puts on view, for the first time since they were purchased from Audubon's widow in 1863, ninety-five of the 435 original watercolors for his masterpiece, the print portfolio *Birds of America*.

I must confess to feeling little excitement about this show when I saw it announced on the Gallery's fall schedule. I am not of a scientific bent, still less possessed of an interest in birds; I had seen the famous Elephant Folio exhibited from time to time, and it had always left me cold. But this exhibition proved to be a revelation, showing Audubon and his achievement in an entirely new light. The prints, which give us Audubon at one remove, are merely models of scientific illustration; the original watercolors are outstanding works of art.

Audubon's sensitivity to, and patent pleasure in, the rich colorings of the birds he painted is apparent in nearly every watercolor. So is his exceptionally keen eye and skilled hand in replicating the subtle changes in color across one of his subjects' wings. To this end, many media besides watercolor are combined: pastel, graphite, even collage. A surprising but not uncommon sight here is a passage of a bird's anatomy painted on a separate sheet of paper, the form then carefully cut out and pasted onto the painting in progress, presumably over an earlier, unsatisfactory attempt.

Audubon seems to have possessed too much passion for his bird subjects to have contained his sensibility within the confines of scientific detachment. There is something monumental and moving in even the most frail of his creatures, and all emerge ennobled, yet without any note of falseness—untruth to nature—or sentimentality.

Sentimentality is the last emotion to be found in Audubon's work. There's no shortage of battles to the death between birds in these paintings, no shortage of blood. Audubon was not afraid to show nature's darker, predatory side. To have ignored it would have been impossible for him, amounting, as it were, to a scientific untruth. This attitude toward nature finds a later expression—perhaps its last—in the paintings of Winslow Homer. Interestingly, the show includes a watercolor of two stricken birds thought to have influenced that remarkable, troubling late painting of Homer's, *Right and Left*.

"John James Audubon: The Watercolors for 'The Birds of America'" was organized by the New-York Historical Society. Over the next two years, it will travel to Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Memphis, New York, Seattle, and San Francisco, with a slightly different selection of watercolors at each venue. A catalogue, edited by Annette Blaugrund and Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., has been published by Villard Books/The New-York Historical Society (384 pages, $75; $39.95 paper).

—*Eric Gibson*

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Theater

Young & at sea

by Donald Lyons

The Willow Cabin Theatre Company, which last season put on three Thornton Wilder one-acts, has gone further back in search of viable American short plays. They have in fact gone to the very root of American theater in their production, at the Harold Clurman Theatre, of Eugene O'Neill's *S.S. Glencairn: Four Plays of the Sea*. The four sketches deal with the lives of merchant seamen working a British tramp steamer. O'Neill wrote them in the years 1914–1917, when he was in his late twenties, and they reflect his own experiences at sea and his own grim views of life.

The plays are presented in what amounts to a narrative sequence, although they were not written in that or any other order. First is "The Moon of the Caribees," taking place before World War I on the main deck of the *Glencairn* as she lies at anchor under a full moon off an island in the West Indies. "A melancholy negro chant, faint and far-off, drifts, crooning, over the water." It is a night for nostalgia and rum and easy women. Director Edward Berkeley dynamically crowds the small Clurman stage with hot, grimy, yelling, horny seamen and with the local "negresses" who come aboard. But after the raucous seamen pair off with the rum-peddling women, a melancholy soul is left to brood; it is Smitty, "a young Englishman with a blond mustache," whom the music drives into unwelcome memories of drink and lost love. He rejects the fellowship of kindly old Donkeyman and of sexy Pearl ("Why you run 'way from me, pretty boy? Ah likes you. . . . You ain't rough. You're a gentleman"). The other men pile back in; there is drunken dancing and a brawl, until an angry officer breaks the whole melee up. Smitty is left to sob at the sound of the "haunted, saddened voice of the brooding music, faint and far-off, like the mood of the moonlight made audible."

In "Bound East for Cardiff," the second play, the *Glencairn* is heading home. We are no longer on the open deck, but in the forecastle sleeping quarters hemmed in by bunks. Led by "brawny Irishman" Driscoll, the seamen grouse about the food as fog rolls in. Driscoll recalls a famous shipwreck "on just such a night as this." On stage right, rough Yank lies dying from an accident and Driscoll shushes an accordion player to let Yank sleep. The captain pops in and gives a grim prognosis, but Driscoll tries to cheer Yank up. Yank pleads with his pal to stay by him; he looks back on the sordidness of sea life ("never meetin' no nice people") and indulges in a fantasy about buying a farm in Canada or Argentina with Driscoll ("just a small one, just enough to live on"). (Could this be the source of the rabbit-farm fantasy so tediously iterated by the pair in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*?) But Yank knows it is too late and asks, "How'd all the fog git in here?" He reminisces about various brawls and even a killing; Driscoll absolves him of guilt about this. Not wanting to die "on a rotten night like this" without stars or

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moon, Yank dies. Driscoll holds him. The fog lifts.

The *Glencairn* has come home in the third play, "The Long Voyage Home," which takes place in a shady dive in Cardiff. It is a melodrama of violence and betrayal in which Driscoll unwittingly leaves Swedish seaman Olson to the tender mercies of saloonkeeper Fat Joe and whore Freda. Joe means to use Freda to slip Olson a mickey and shanghai him aboard a sadistic ship. Sweet Olson, with two years' pay in his pocket, looks forward to seeing his mother and his farm again, even though he has lost his girl through prolonged absence at sea. He has given up demon rum and keeps resisting the fatal potion, but at last he sociably yields to Freda's urgings. When Driscoll comes back for him, Joe says he's gone off with Freda.

The last play, "In the Zone," returns us to the forecastle of "Bound East for Cardiff." It is 1915, and the *Glencairn* is sailing through the submarine- and mine-infested waters of the North Atlantic. The men are tense, jittery, paranoid. When Smitty, the gentlemanly sad sack of "Moon," is glimpsed secreting a small black box under his mattress, Driscoll and four other seamen work themselves up into a lather of suspicion, eventually deciding that Smitty is a German spy hiding a bomb. They gag and tie the furious Smitty to his bunk on stage left and on stage right cluster to douse the box in water and then gingerly open it. Finding a packet of letters, they suspect coded messages. But as Driscoll reads aloud a long letter from Smitty's despairing girlfriend saying his drunkenness has wrecked both their lives, the truth dawns; the men grow abashed and still. Only Smitty's muffled sobs are audible. They free him and slip ashamed into their bunks, as he lies curled in agony on the deck.

The way to do these plays is with a passionate, full-throated sincerity, with a naïve energy, uncritically swallowing their mixed cocktail of poetry and self-pity. These plays' hulking simplicities of feeling and action and utterance must educe corresponding virtues in the playing and staging, or else. The Willow Cabin enters with strong sympathy and strong art into the occasion. Miguel Lopez-Castillo's sets, naturalist but minimalist, are marked by grim, dark-wood shapes such as bunk and barrel and table. The playing has thrust and anger and power; at once homogeneous and supply individualized, it is recognizably the product of a true "ensemble" or "collective" (the Willow Cabin uses both words to describe itself). These sea plays were, after all, originally put on by a group O'Neill and others organized—the Provincetown Players: the Playwrights' Theatre—and thus a certain collective spirit is in their bones. But collectivity here, as I said, fosters rather than diminishes individual excellence. Standouts are: John Bolger as Smitty, the heartsick Englishman of "The Moon of the Caribees" and "In the Zone"; Adam Oliensis as the gruffly sentimental Driscoll, a sort of moral center (though occasionally errant) of the ship; Michael Rispoli as the dying Yank in "Bound East for Cardiff," a role that Rispoli energetically kept from sinking into bathos, and also as the sinister Fat Joe in "The Long Voyage Home." Perhaps best of all was the trustful Swede, Olson, of Laurence Gleason, who laced the character's dumb openness with a remote and wintry dignity; he added a quiet complexity and inwardness to the man that one hopes would have delighted O'Neill.

A word about the diction of the plays. They were written down very programmatically in the orthography of various dialects; it was in 1917 a red flag of defiance—and hence very appealing—for the playwright to use the idioms of the outcast, to eschew the languid periods of the drawing room. Thus a characteristic utterance of Driscoll's reads like this: "God blarst ut! No man at all cud be puttin' up wid de loike av this." The problem today is to escape from the no-less-artificial constraints of such demotic rhetoric back into intelligibility. Director Edward Berkeley has wisely chosen a middle path: he has the players keep a dusting of dialect—Irish, Swedish, Caribbean, whatever—on their

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speech but sees the overriding goal as forceful communication in clear English. He is also, of course, sensitive to such pervasive determinants of mood and meaning as music (there is a haunting moment when the men sing "Across the Wide Missouri" as a kind of funeral dirge) and light and fog.

These four plays are agreed to be the best of the twenty or so one-acts O'Neill wrote before turning to full-length drama in 1918 with *Beyond the Horizon*, a play itself about the conflicting lures of sea and farm and about a fatal brotherly rivalry in love. Of O'Neill it can surely be said that in his beginning is his end, for these very themes and anxieties and torments were to inform his art right through his final masterwork, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which he wrote in 1940-41 and which was not produced until after his death. In it young Edmund Tyrone, the Eugene O'Neill surrogate, talks of the night he spent on the bowsprit of a square rigger bound for Buenos Aires when "I became drunk with the beauty and singing rhythm of it. I lost myself—actually lost my life. I was set free! I dissolved in the sea." The sea remained always for O'Neill a locus of escape, of absolution from life; the sea was death, and it was precisely this posthumous quality of life at sea that O'Neill, a man who with much of his heart and soul hated life, so loved.

These early one-acts show this marine mythicizing aborning. A ship is a place where those broken by drink, those inept in love, the feckless dreamers helpless in adult life, go to drown in the stupefying iterations of work and debauchery. "Home" is a faded memory or a sketchy fantasy of farm and mother and wife; shore is a mere occasion for brawling and killing.

O'Neill is an heir, a late and sour heir, of that American literary habit of male running away to a narcotic otherwhere exempt from life's tedious quotidian compromises. This tradition, trailblazed more than thirty years ago by Leslie Fiedler, famously includes *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby-Dick*. The Melville book, also a tribute to the nihilistic allure of the sea, has a symphonic exuberance and humor when put alongside the four little sea chanteys of O'Neill. Woman is, in this universe, either A) the too-perfect Madonna mourning the self-destruction of the male or B) the blowzy but goodhearted waterfront whore. (O'Neill will attempt, in *Anna Christie*, to turn B into A.)

However imperfect his understanding of and grasp on his true matter in these early plays, poor O'Neill did worse by forsaking it in his middle period. He tried to build huge dramatic cathedrals out of Freudian jetsam, like those neighborhood savants who make Babels out of Coke cans. The results were things like *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Only at the end, enfeebled and withdrawn, did he see that, to become at long last a great artist, he must go back and back and back and confront what drove him to sea in the first place: his father and his mother and his brother and himself. He found waiting there not the empty Freudian familial scenarios but the real face of a real family. The pain of family—that terrible theme of O'Neill's great play and of his personal life as well—was not something he was at all ready to bring into these early sea plays, which are very much the work of a gifted young writer in headlong flight from just this topic. But for all their immaturity they possess a tender, insinuating beauty of their own, a beauty that—just because there is no hint of influence or imitation—might be called Chekhovian.

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The media

Care TV

by James Bowman

Of all the many badges of fashionability among the young which it is the prerogative of the old and the middle-aged to hate, the most annoying to me is the turned-around baseball cap. It's not so much that this headgear is without any practical use. Many of the garments that young (and older) people wear have no real practical use. The upper buttonhole on the lapel of men's suits has had no function for centuries. But the buttonhole has a sense of decency and decorum. It nobly continues the *pretense* of function, making a kind of ritual obeisance to its original purpose and thus to the purpose of clothing generally. The baseball cap worn backwards is pure statement. Not only does it have no purpose, it aggressively denies its purpose. Worn the right way round, the bill keeps the sun off the face; worn the wrong way round, it insists on *not* keeping the sun off the face.

Call it, if you like, a postmodern gesture, a kind of rebellion against—since there is nothing else left to rebel against—oneself. But in its exaltation of the empty gesture just *because* it is empty and a gesture, it strikes me as the perfect emblem for the new wave of sentimentalism which has moved in like spiritual kudzu, like intellectual zebra mussels, to take over the ecosystem of public discourse in America. At its simplest this sentimentalism could be heard last year in George Bush's crude assurance to the voters of New Hampshire, many of whom were supposed to be in distress at the time: "Message: I care." The advertisement of caring as a "message" may not have been mere inarticulateness but a frank admission that not only was the message entirely about caring but the caring was entirely about message.

For Bush had nothing in particular to offer the New Hampshiremen that day: he just wanted to make a sympathetic noise of the sort which the media, whose stock-in-trade is "messages" of that sort, expected him to make. And then, of course, they laughed at him for making it so ineptly. Here is another of the seemingly endless self-contradictions of the media world—the kind of thing we saw last month when Dan Rather got a lot of publicity for attacking the triviality and shallowness of network-television news shows, one of which he himself presides over every day of the week. "We should all be ashamed of what we have and have not done, measured against what we could do," he said, sounding like a penitent in a Chinese re-education camp, and then went on exactly as before. Ah, Dan! What would we do without him to give voice to our feelings about the absurdity of the modern media—and to illustrate it at the same time.

It has probably escaped his notice, but the fact is that for the media the gesture is better when it is empty, since sorting out what it corresponds to in real terms takes a lot of effort and is too hard for today's ever more fickle audiences, equipped with remote-

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control devices, to understand. "The devil is in the details," to use one of Ross Perot's most quoted phrases. It would be nice to think that that is why the media prefer to stay so far away from them, but it is not. Devils they don't mind; details scare the hell out of them. That is the reason for the golden glow of admiration surrounding the reporting of President Clinton's health-care speech (and later of the First Lady's testimony before a congressional committee) in a media circus which included two hundred radio talk-show hosts setting up shop on the White House lawn. The admiration came not in spite of a lack of hard details to explain how the plan was to work, but because of it. That is part of how you make a speech media-friendly and thus forestall difficult questioning—something that George Bush, whose own admiration for Clinton's speech broke a self-imposed silence about his successor, never quite learned how to do.

There is, after all, a trick to it. "Caring" and "compassion" must be tailored to a public increasingly sophisticated in negotiating our national fantasyland of images, and, paradoxically, what that public craves is the image of "reality." That is why the most riveting drama on television recently has been seen on Court TV: the Los Angeles trial of Lyle and Erik Menendez for the shotgun murder of their parents. There they have a guest lawyer-commentator to explain what is going on, but most of TV's exciting news images—such as the dragging of the corpse of an American soldier through the streets of Mogadishu, a videotaped holdup and shooting at a jewelry shop in Washington, D.C., and the fighting around the Russian parliament building, all of which got a frequent airing in the last month—come with very inadequate interpretation. To those who presented them, these compelling images turn out to have said very little: that it is time to get out of Somalia, that we need more gun-control laws, and that Yeltsin is the good guy in Russia for shooting "former communists" (and what is Yeltsin himself, pray tell?) who didn't want to submit themselves to elections.

There is a certain hit-or-miss quality to such insights, to say the least. Any viewer wishing to know, for example, what it was that the rebel parliamentarians were so cross at Mr. Yeltsin about, so as to gauge the justice of their case for himself, was pretty much out of luck. The pregnant image, like the meaningful gesture, is not welcome here. Too much significance is a brake on understanding, and bewildered audiences at the limit of their attention span begin to reach for the remote control. The same attention span is increasingly catered to by the print media, and in the week when the fighting in Moscow and Mogadishu lit up every screen, *Time* magazine was forced to issue a shamefaced apology for having bought a staged photo of some supposed child prostitutes and their pimp in Moscow last June. Yet again it was made clear that the demand for televisual-style "reality" exceeds the supply.

The incident also shows that there are plenty of enterprising characters like Mr. Alexei Ostrovsky, aged eighteen, who sold the photo to *Time*, that are ready to fill the gap. *Time*'s apology for the "error" came after a particularly pompous self-defense back in August, yet the only sufferer so far in the whole affair seems to have been Mr. Richard Ellis, the photo editor for Reuters in Moscow who first spotted the imposture. He was reassigned—on the grounds, quoth Reuters, that "as a policy we do not like to criticize other media publicly"—and subsequently resigned. Where they have made an industry out of reproducing the images of "reality," the *real* reality can be a dangerous thing to get hold of. Tough for Mr. Ellis. But an even darker thought for the rest of us is this: maybe the *real* reality is no more welcome to the consumers than to the producers of media images. For both, it instantly devalues their holdings in the currency of whatever is passing for reality at the moment.

In words, fakery is easier to detect but harder to prove than it is in photos. But the empty verbal gesture has become so much a part of the common currency that there are no Richard Ellises who even bother to pro-

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test about it. By a kind of onomatopoetic license, the empty verbal gesture is taken as the practical equivalent of what it describes, in particular when it describes feelings thought to be creditable to the feeler. "Message: I care" equals caring. Such feelings are exempted by the media and—presumably—its audience from any logical or practical consequences that may otherwise attach to them. For example, speaking not long ago about his and his Rainbow Coalition's attitudes toward NAFTA, Jesse Jackson said: "We are for free trade. We are for expanded trade. We are not for losing textile workers' jobs, and auto workers' jobs." In other words, he is for all good things and against all bad things.

Of course it is not just Jesse Jackson. He is only doing what all politicians will naturally try to do by ducking the hard questions about how to choose between good things—and the even harder questions about how to choose between bad things. The point is that the media lets him—and other politicians—get away with ducking them. They are not interested in the follow-ups either, unless maybe they sniff a scandal. For them, much more than for the politician, economics, like life, is a simple matter because it is a matter of feelings. If you have the right feelings, the fact that protecting textile or auto workers' jobs may be logically and practically inconsistent with free trade need never even be considered unless you are actually governing—and neither Jesse Jackson nor the press is ever likely to be driven to that extremity.

It was not always thus. One pleasure (there are not many) of watching the PBS series "The Great Depression," running from late October through November, is the occasional snatch of a political speech from the 1920s or 1930s in which the speaker obviously recognizes that striking an attitude is not enough and actually commits some act of ratiocination in the presence of—usually—a crowd of the hardy sons of toil. Of course they didn't have a remote control and were used to working hard at things anyway. Life was tougher, more serious in those days and people hadn't the luxury of trading in the coin of gesture and compassionate feelings only, without expecting anything practical to be done about it. Hunger will do that to people.

Regrettably, there are few such moments in this series, which was written and produced by people of the 1990s and so does not devote a single moment of its commentary to an examination of the Depression's causes. (The companion book by T. H. Watkins devotes a few pages to this subject but seems almost equally uninterested in any explanations that do not involve insufficient amounts of caring on somebody's part.) Instead we get predictable stuff ridiculing the likes of Dwight Morrow or Henry Ford for saying that depressions are good for you, and tales of "grinding poverty and fabulous wealth side by side" (though of course neither the poverty nor the wealth was so extreme as it was in most periods of human history), and analysis on the order of Mr. Gore Vidal's assertion that Franklin Roosevelt "saved capitalism." Mr. Vidal is himself, by the way, characteristically rueful about that accomplishment.

Children and other unformed intellects who get their ideas about the Depression from this series will come away from it with the impression that poverty and unemployment were caused by rich people not caring enough about the plight of the poor. The election of 1932 is characterized thus: "Roosevelt suggested that his New Deal would make government more responsive to the suffering caused by the Depression. President Hoover remained opposed to increased demands upon the federal government." The reason for this opposition is that Hoover "feared relief given to workers directly would create a permanent class of demoralized poor people," say the authors, as if this were some kind of primitive superstition instead of the reality we see all around us today. Likewise, they claim that the recession of 1937 was solely the result of federal budget cuts—a brief recrudescence of heartless, Republican ways of thinking.

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Yet the propaganda is not so crude as to be able to ignore the fact that the Depression did not end until the Second World War brought back full employment. All that caring and not very much to show for it after all. But if the people behind "The Great Depression" do not ignore this, neither do they make any connection between it and the Rooseveltian program. It was enough that somebody cared, or claimed to care, even if such caring was inefficacious or counterproductive. That is the genuine Nineties touch, the contemporary template superimposed upon the Thirties—although it may be able to trace herein its own forging to the mythography of the Thirties. To be fair, the history of the growth of official and governmental "compassion" in America is not a contemptible subject, and it has particular value in the considerable attention which the series devotes to racial discrimination, lynching, and so forth. But it would have come better from someone less caught up in the romance of socialism (Upton Sinclair and Norman Thomas receive by far the most sympathetic treatment of all the political figures in the series) and the welfare state.

Of course, allowance must be made for the fact that such romantics have pretty much got to stay fixed in the 1930s if they are not to risk disillusionment. The only contemporary haven for them, it would seem, is in the politics of AIDS—at least if the film of Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On*, which ran on HBO in September, is anything to go by. This "controversial" bit of filmmaking must have singlehandedly set back the gay-rights movement by a decade or so. For not only does the film show AIDS, in defiance of the official rhetoric, as a homosexual disease, it also shows homosexuality itself as being inextricably bound up with father-hatred—in this case hatred of the Great White Father in Washington, Ronald Reagan, who, naturally, did not "care" enough.

So, after all that work to persuade us that homosexuality was congenital, like sex or skin color, and not a result, as Freud maintained, of a failure in socialization within the family, this film insists on associating it with a hysterical rant against the national father figure. Ronald Reagan caused—or at least made impossible a cure for—the AIDS epidemic? I am myself inclined to agnosticism about the "gay gene" which (some have claimed) determines sexual orientation long before the embryo even has time to get started on its putative Oedipal tendencies, but this seems too perfectly to fit the Freudian pattern. Couldn't they have figured out some way to blame it on Mrs. Thatcher?

At one point the film's hero-doctor, played by Matthew Modine, stands up to shout at a generic hearing room: "How many people have to die to make it cost efficient for you people to do something about it? One hundred? One thousand? Give us a number so we won't annoy you again until the amount of money you begin spending on lawsuits makes it more profitable for you to save people than to kill them." The desired reaction to this speech is of course outrage that there should be any such thing as cost-effectiveness tests when it comes to matters of life and death. But that is the most obvious sort of demagoguery. Such tests are normal and inevitable. Shilts and Co. themselves would presumably not impugn the character of national leaders who somehow neglected to rally the nation to fight a holy war on, say, muscular dystrophy. What's the point of Jerry Lewis if we expect the president to do his job?

Why don't the AIDS activists find their own Jerry Lewis? I'm sure that Elizabeth Taylor would be willing to take on the job. Instead they haunt the realm of public policy where, like it or not, the issue inevitably is a matter of numbers and of the money available for a great many good causes. To go on to speak, as Modine's character does, of those who concern themselves with such matters as being motivated by what is "profitable," or to hint that any refusal to meet all the demands of advocates of a particular disease is to "kill" people, is reprehensible. It is intellectual dishonesty of the first order. Moreover, it is a further en-

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couragement to the rampant sentimentalism that is undermining democratic institutions with a quasi-Oriental attitude to our nation's principal magistrate.

For in this film, as in "The Great Depression," as in so much of the liberal culture to which both appeal, the president is expected to become, instead of the efficient manager of the resources we entrust to him, the great symbolic national carer-in-chief, the benevolent life-giver from whom should flow all blessings to a grateful people. This is the natural end point to which the "compassion" mania brings us. The fact that we have arrived there so comparatively quickly is attributable to the vast national wealth we have accumulated since the days of poor old Herbert Hoover and to the vast proportion of it which we have chosen to sink into mass communications. Fifty-seven channels and nothing on, as Bruce Springsteen puts it. It's enough to make you want to wear your baseball cap backwards—or else to wonder if Dwight Morrow and Henry Ford may not have had a point about the usefulness of depressions.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

The travels of Henry James *by Hilton Kramer*
Stephen Carter's "Culture of Disbelief" *by Roger Kimball*
The life & times of Seneca *by Dana Gioia*
Wilkie Collins *by Brooke Allen*
The Oneida experiment *by Marc M. Arkin*
Walter de la Mare *by Michael Glover*
The world of John Burroughs *by Guy Davenport*
Sacheverell Sitwell *by Jeffrey Meyers*
The cult of Emily Carr *by Karen Wilkin*

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Books

The apostle of inversion

by H. J. Kaplan

Some forty-odd years ago, in my office at the chancery of the American Embassy in Paris, I was visited by a young man who looked like a bantamweight boxer just past his prime: balding and broken-nosed, in a byronic collar, a light gray suit, and flashy yellowish pumps which must have caught my eye because they were the kind one saw at the Bal Nègre, or the Bar des Apaches on the Rue de Lappe, some such place, where you went to inspect the underside of the newly liberated French capital and hobnob with pimps and whores. This was Jean Genet, sent (if memory serves) by Jean-Paul Sartre, the brightest new star on the literary horizon; and bearing a huge typescript or galley proof of what would have been *Notre Dame des Fleurs* or *Le Miracle de la Rose*, probably both, the autobiographical novels he had written in the Santé or Fresnes, the least terrible of the prisons in which he had been confined during the German Occupation—not as a resistant, he hastened to assure me, but as a felon, a common thief. Indeed, he was currently living in the shadow of another condemnation, which might entail what the French called relegation, i.e., life imprisonment as a four-time loser, unless the magistrate's hand could be stayed by Genet's growing reputation and the intervention of his many admirers in the world of literature, the theater, fashion, etc. In short, le Tout-Paris and Saint-Germain des Prés were mobilizing in his favor and he wasn't too worried about the outcome. What he needed at the moment was money. Perhaps, since there was nothing in my office worth stealing, and I was not about to invite him into my home—right?—I could help him find a publisher. Not a legitimate one, of course; he knew his stuff wasn't publishable legally in my benighted country; but illegitimate was preferable anyway, providing we could get him a good translator and a generous advance.

His texts, which I read that evening and late into the night, were indeed not publishable in the America of that time, but their documentary content—the manners, morals, and language of his milieu—was riveting; and their literary quality was undeniable. Truly, a *frisson nouveau*: rhythmic classical prose, precise and learned to the point of preciosity, but then startled to life by argot and obscenity and lightning flashes of intensity and power; a dizzying descent into what Genet had remembered or dreamed up, but in any case rendered, as at once an inferno and a Paradise Lost of abjection and beauty: the tiny rural village of his childhood, the boulevards and squares of a Montmartre haunted by prostitutes and petty crooks, the reformatories and prisons in which he and his homosexual lovers had spent their youth and in the end their lives in a desperate search for . . . what? *They* had no idea. They were for the most part inarticulate and stupid young toughs. But Jean Genet knew —because he was a poet and because he was literally and figuratively locked up with them

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and ceaselessly dreamed of them. He saw them as dedicated to an intransigent elegance and style and even, in the case of the bravest and most desirable of them, prepared to suffer martyrdom to attain the state of grace which for Genet was inherent in sin—not just any sin but the saintly sin which involved the deliberate and defiant rejection (negation) of our world and its morality—but which for them could only mean mindless tumescence and desire leading inevitably to violence and crime and the apotheosis of retribution: the guillotine.

The rest is history. The unpublishable texts of forty years ago are the best-sellers of today. Saved from relegation by a presidential pardon, Genet went on to write *The Maids*, *Deathwatch*, *Funeral Rites*, and the *Thief's Journal*; and then, after a long period of silence, the famous last plays: *The Balcony*, *The Blacks*, and *The Screens*. He never entered the French Academy, but in 1983 he received one of France's most prestigious literary prizes, and three years later Roland Dumas, Mitterrand's foreign minister, was at the airport to see his casket off to Morocco for burial among the Arabs whose cause he had espoused in the last years of his life. Not exactly an apotheosis, but then he was only a writer and had never murdered anyone, after all, not even a little peasant girl, like the first victim of his hero, Harcamone.

The publisher Claude Gallimard was also at the airport to see Genet off in 1986. I doubt whether he ever reproached his father for publishing Genet—it was the Catholic poet Paul Claudel who sadly predicted to Gaston Gallimard that he would one day have to face his children and explain how a respectable French businessman could have brought himself to publish such stuff—but there is no question that the successive editions of the Collected Works, first brought out in 1952-53 with a seven-hundred-page preface by Sartre, have been very good business for Gallimard, whose list this autumn includes Edmund White's new biography of Genet and a new edition of the *Thief's Journal*, *Querelle de Brest*, and *Funeral Rites*, this time with a preface by Philippe Sollers, novelist, essayist, former editor of *Tel Quel*—the Maoist, Structuralist, Deconstructionist review—and arguably the trendiest writer on the current scene.

An enduring paradox of our high culture, especially since the waning of the middle ages, has been its double and contradictory role—on the one hand as a respected Institution, a pillar of the established order reflecting and transmitting communal experience and values, and on the other as the favored instrument of the adversarial forces inherent in the Western idea of society as an ongoing enterprise of autonomous individuals in which time (history) is of the essence and the only constant is change. What is true of high culture in general is especially true of literature, and even more so of the so-called advance-guard literature of Renaissance Europe and thereafter, the more radical *Dichter und Denker* of Germany, culminating in Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, and the post-revolutionary "outcast poets" (*poètes maudits*) of England, Italy, and France.

This phenomenon is all too familiar to us; we live, as it were, in its wake. To be sure, the gravity and gravamen of the advance guard tend to be trivialized in the age of mass culture. The hieratic themes of the high priests of Surrealism turn up in Bergdorf Goodman window displays; and the revolutionary nihilism of Jean-Paul Sartre becomes—in some popular theater of the Parisian grands boulevards—entertainment, like everything else. Old Rabelais could proclaim in the sixteenth century that he would defend his ideas with determination "up to the stake, exclusively," but now, in the West at least, it is the stakes that have gone up in smoke. The writer who would produce a *frisson nouveau*, let alone a reaction of outrage or dismay, finds himself frustrated, not by the Inquisitors but by the law of diminishing returns.

Such, alas, was the fate of Jean Genet, who spent his long and busy life—1910–1986—seeking (in vain, despite his re-

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markable talent) to solve this problem and, in the process, producing the widely sold and translated prose works and poetic dramas mentioned above, together with a number of lesser known political tracts written on behalf of the American Black Panthers and the Palestinian Arabs. He did manage on occasion to get under French skins, less by celebrating homosexuality and criminality than by communicating the intense and unrelenting hatred he felt for his native country; and he at least once set off a public uproar—in 1977, with an article he published in *Le Monde*, a respectable Parisian daily, in defense of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist gang; but the indignation was shortlived and the enduring upshot of his literary labors was not only to enrich himself, his publishers, and his theatrical producers but also, however the irony of it might have galled him, to become a monument, an honored exemplar of French civilization, indeed of Western civilization, in our time.

And now, thanks to Edmund White, an American novelist who is also the co-author of *The Joy of Gay Sex* and (as I learn from his home-town newspaper, the Paris-based *International Herald Tribune*) a founder of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, we have what purports—quite convincingly, since it runs to 728 pages with its bibliography, footnotes, and index, plus forty-odd pages of acknowledgments, chronology, and introduction—to be a definitive biography of this remarkable man,[1] whose failure to become a *poète maudit* in the tradition of Villon and Rimbaud must be attributed to a deplorable *Zeitgeist*, or ideological climate, certainly not to any lack of talent or energy or courage. Genet did what he could, and that was plenty; he reworked his prose again and again and White spares us not a single revision; and if his poetic entrancement with crab lice, his lyrical enthusiasm for male organs of various shapes and colors, his ecstatic admiration of betrayal and crime, all expressed in language which now (after forty years!) often reads to me like a parody of Bishop Bossuet by a mischievous high-school student named Marcel Proust—if all this was overvalued on its appearance by Cocteau, Bataille, and Sartre, and later by such worthy professors as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, it was certainly no fault of his; nor could the earnest promoters of Jean Genet have been expected to anticipate that, however old hat they themselves have become in France, where they have indeed faded from view in recent years, they would be elevated to heroic status by the Modern Language Association and a hundred English Lit departments in a country which Genet despised quite as much as his own.

White's biography of "Saint Genet," as Sartre called him in his introduction to the Gallimard edition, partly in joking reference to Genet's hieratic tone, is by no means hagiographic or even uncritical, although the length and detail of the book do mean what they seem to mean; and we must assume that White accepts not only the received opinion about his subject—i.e., that Genet is a major writer, a poet of the highest order—but also the notion, so prevalent in modern literary circles, that there is indeed something saintly in the passionate assertion of any individual freedom, whatever its purpose, against the forces of repression and tradition. If White were pharisaical enough to see these ideas as absurd on their face, as I do, he would never have spent six years and mobilized the help of hundreds of witnesses, scholars, bibliographers, and publishing people in order to construct this monument; and this, be it said in all seriousness, would have been in one respect, at least, a pity: it would have deprived us of a solid piece of work, a biography that speaks very tellingly about the culture and society in which we live.

First published by Chatto & Windus in Great Britain, and soon to be available in all the major European languages, the book begins with a fascinating account of the poet's childhood as a ward of the Assistance Publique, the French welfare system which

1 *Genet: A Biography*, by Edmund White; Knopf, 728 pages, $35.

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cares for foundling children by placing them, as in Genet's case, in foster homes. This is valuable social history, although it can hardly tell us how this particular child became, first, an outstanding pupil in the local grade school, which he left at the age of twelve, and then, in rapid succession—in the period between two great wars—a habitual thief, delinquent soldier, jailbird, and vagabond, who never held a job but spent years in barracks and prisons reading his way through world literature and spinning out masturbatory fantasies about his comrades and cellmates. It cannot tell it us how he then went on, after he had begun writing these fantasies and, between prisons, frequenting booksellers and stealing from them—in the peculiarly Parisian *demi-monde* of con men, shady art dealers, and prostitutes mostly male, the world evoked by writers like Francis Carco and (after World War II) in the memoirs of Maurice Sachs—to attract the attention of Jean Cocteau and members of his circle, the one group that could launch him in the twilight of the German Occupation, just before Sartre and his friends emerged to pick up the torch.

At this point, with the first copies of *Notre Dame des Fleurs* circulating, albeit clandestinely, Genet awoke—in prison again—to find himself famous. From then on, as we have seen, the combination of his prose and his recurring problems with the law made him an object of tender solicitude on the part of the French literary elite. Not all of it, to be sure, and in different degrees, but the fact remains that the foundling boy from the Morvan was thereafter to be befriended and protected, as White extensively shows, "by some of the leading minds of his day: the philosophers Sartre, Derrida and Foucault; the writers Cocteau and Jouhandeau, Juan Goytisolo and Moravia, the composers Stravinsky and Boulez; the stage director Roger Blin; the painters Leonor Fini and Christian Bérard, the sculptor Giacometti; the political leaders Pompidou and Mitterrand." And this, one hastens to add, is an extremely abbreviated list.

Genet's characteristic attitude toward these people was one of arrogance and challenge. His genius and his circumstances had made him the poetic apostle of inversion, and this—since none subverted the social order as radically as he did—simply set him beyond their ken. After the incandescent writing of the war years—he would never write so well again—he pretended to turn his back on literature and to care only for his friends and lovers and, from time to time, for the assertion of his "ideas," such as they were, in the theater or elsewhere, e.g., in support of the Black Panthers or the Palestinian Arabs or the insurrectionary students in Paris during May 1968. His doubts, apparently quite genuine, about the enduring value of his work never seemed to affect his belief in his moral mission.

White presents him, nonetheless, as a major figure, and whatever one thinks of Genet's art the man's itinerary can hardly leave us indifferent. At its outset, in the atmosphere of a tiny village in rural France on the eve of World War I, we become aware of the foundling's anguished question about who and what he was, sexually and socially; and this concern about his role and role-playing provides us with an essential key to his character, which turns out, just as Heraclitus said it would, also to be his fate. Like his fictional heroes, Genet is always dressing up, acting out; and the one great constant of his life is his refusal to be dominated and determined by his nature and the given social order—locked up, as it were, within his preordained persona. His boys play at being girls, become girls; his maids become mistresses, his blacks wear white masks; and so it goes, good is bad and vice is virtue and betrayal is faith; everything is—in the end quite predictably—turned back to front and upside down. Genet's career keeps reminding us that the Nietzschean "transvaluation of all values" is, among so much else, an eminently *theatrical* idea.

All of which suggests that Edmund White's *Genet*, while providing us with the material we need in order to know what is going on, rather fails to do justice to its

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comic dimension, as exemplified in the production of Genet's plays by the (subventioned) National Theater, or in Genet's statement to the effect that, if ever the Palestinians won out and achieved statehood, he would be obliged to part company with them, since he was implacably opposed to all states. A final example: when Jean-Paul Sartre said or did something irritating to our hero, Genet wrote to a correspondent that the eminent author of *L'Etre et Le Néant* was really a bit *faux-jeton* (meaning treacherous), and quickly added: "a characteristic I've always admired in him, of course."

I am quoting from memory, but the precise words hardly matter. *Se non è vero*, as the Italians say . . . but what does matter is that Edmund White's *Genet* is an excellent book about an important figure; a dead white European male, to be sure, like Dante, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, but nevertheless a representative man of our time.

Tough buttons

Gertrude Stein A Stein Reader.
Edited and with an introduction
by Ulla E. Dydo.
Northwestern University Press,
624 pages, $59.95; $29.95 paper

reviewed by Guy Davenport

A few months ago Gertrude Stein was at a Lexington, Kentucky, bookstore, promoting her latest. I learned this by overhearing one sorority sweetheart shouting to another on campus: "It was fab seeing her in person! I mean, you know, Gertrude Stein!"

It was Gloria Steinem at the bookstore, but what other American writer, forty-seven years dead, can claim a place in the sparse learning of the intrepidly illiterate? Gertrude Stein is firmly wedged in the American mind, together with Alice Babette Toklas. Her salon at 27 rue de Fleurus (between the Boulevard Raspail and the Luxembourg Gardens) is an echo of the eighteenth century. There, in a room as famous as any in our time, hung with Picassos, Cézannes, Matisses, and Derains, one might encounter Hemingway, Lipchitz, or Sherwood Anderson. Even Ezra Pound (he broke a chair, and was never invited again).

She is a vivid figure in the history of art, of writing, of the two world wars, of music, of popular culture, and of academic folklore. Yale printed all of her posthumous writing, six volumes of them. Periodically there are compendia, like this one, published in the thin hope that somebody will read her. Random House has kept a *Selected Writings* in print for decades. The general opinion is that *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) is charming, that *Three Lives* (1908) is significant, that her operas (scores by Virgil Thomson) are great fun, but that the large part of her copious works is unreadable. It takes heroic effort to make one's way through the thousand pages of *The Making of Americans*, and conscientious students who have read *A Long Gay Book* and *Stanzas in Meditation* and *How to Write* should be issued a medal by the American Academy.

The century will end with our having to admit that we have learned how to read some, but not all, of its writing. Joyce and Pound demanded a redefinition of the act of reading. It is still not clear what Gertrude Stein was trying to do. Where we can understand her, she repays attention in great measure. We can specify fairly accurately what of hers we can and can't read, and to what degree her pages make sense. At one extreme is the easy, flexible style of the *Autobiography*, and at the other the "Cubist" nonsense of repetitions and agrammatical phrases of *A Long Gay Book* (whose title does not mean what you think). In between, we have the epic echolalia and logorrhea of *The Making of Americans*, and the plays and operas, which always make a kind of sense. We can understand *The Mother of Us All* in the same way that we understand Mother Goose and Edward Lear (and shall we add Wallace Stevens?).

Many children and even a dull professor or so can enjoy "Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights" if only to laugh at the little dog who

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says "Thank you!" to everything, and because we've heard of Faustus and Mephistopheles.

Ulla Dydo has put together a selection of Stein's writing quite different from previous ones (though Richard Kostelanetz had broken ground in this direction). It is all Difficult Gertrude Stein, and very hard to read. Except for excerpts from *The Making of Americans* and *Stanzas in Meditation*, all the texts are complete.

Those who, like William Carlos Williams, saw Gertrude Stein as a revolutionary shaking-up of writing, claimed that she was scrubbing words clean, so that we can see them anew. She was, to her own mind, being a Cubist. That is, she was making a fractal sketch of things, the way Picasso and Braque could draw a mandolin with a few suggestive lines. Her most successful technique was teasing, making us guess, alerting us to the traps in language that we normally avoid or can't be bothered to think about. Here Stein moves parallel to Wittgenstein, who saw that language is a game with agreed-upon rules.

If Gertrude and Ludwig had ever met, apparently they could have talked for hours about the sixth Act IV of *An Exercise in Analysis* (1917). The act in its entirety is: "Now I understand." This is the sort of statement that worried Wittgenstein for the last thirty years of his life. It involves the problem of other minds, of certainty, of epistemology, and the language game. We can supply many contexts for such a statement.

"Here is plenty of space" is another bit of dialogue in this play. I hear William James in his Harvard classroom, with Miss Stein alone paying attention. There is the same amount of space everywhere, evenly distributed. But not, Samuel Beckett would say, in this world. Is the speaker arranging the furniture or arriving in California? "Can you see numbers?" "Call me Ellen." "Extra size plates."

Gertrude Stein was a great reader. In novels, Henry James's for instance, characters talk, and in their nuances lurk the subtlest intricacies of the author's web. Imagine a text of a novel, say James's *The Sacred Fount*, from which everything has been extracted except the dialogue.

The difficult pieces collected here have puzzled readers and stymied critics since they were known. What are they? The music of Philip Glass can help us, a little: repetition with slight variants can be mesmerizing or tedious, according to your nerves. The sheer cheekiness of it commands respect. We realize that we are in the presence of a sophisticated and cunning technique, of an achieved style. Stein is, with her array of styles, asking to be put beside Picasso. *Stanzas in Meditation*, read aloud in a good voice, is eerily like Shakespeare's sonnets for sonority and majesty of line. These poems *say* something, but what? It's like overhearing an actor two rooms away. You can feel the cadences and the power, but you can't hear it well enough to know if it's Donne, Milton, or Marlowe. It's like watching a photograph develop in the tray before it is recognizable.

If only we could make her texts come alive as they do in Virgil Thomson's music. We can get somewhere by suspecting comedy practically everywhere and laugh with Gertrude rather than at her. Her writing is always elated, spirited, good-humored.

James Laughlin, who was once Gertrude and Alice's errand boy, automobile mechanic, and typist (under injunction to bathe daily, as "men smell"), has described Gertrude at work. She wrote in an exercise book resting on her thigh, and the writing did not interfere with her carrying on a conversation (Laughlin timed her: two and a half minutes to fill a page). Alice was in the next room, typing the previous exercise book. Do not be put off by the conversation; Dickens worked the same way. What we should see is the sureness of what she was doing. She trusted her style.

There were, however, agonies. Ulla Dydo's excellent headnotes to these pieces reveal unsuspected, extensive revision in the earlier work. They also identify occasions and names with some critical observations.

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Citing an event in relation to a text is frustratingly unhelpful. What we need is a way to read Gertrude Stein. My experience has been that there's sense there. In one of Picasso's densest Cubist works a scholar has recently been able to discern the figure of Arcimboldo's *Librarian*, so that we can now see the visual logic of what had seemed an abstract shingling of small, busy angles. This is not finding the bunny in a puzzle picture; it is recognition of aesthetic organization.

My sense is that Stein began with what in another writer would be an idea. She does not, however, propose to develop the idea into a plot, a poem, or an essay, but to submit it to the chemistry of her considerable intellect. One day she must have heard, or herself remarked, that Byron's life would make an interesting play. She is not going to write the play; she is going to think about the intricacies of historical figures in plays, and what a play is. So, in 1933, she wrote "Byron A Play," which seems to be about Byron, plays, and the problem of what we mean when we say a famous name. *Seems*. To read it we need to find a part of our brain that we have never used, where the synapses are differently designed. It is the very literate equivalent of children playing in a sandbox. They are happy, busy, purposeful in their own way, but only angels know what they think they're doing.

Festival of smoke

Leni Riefenstahl A Memoir.
St. Martin's Press, 669 pages, $35

reviewed by Jeremy Murray-Brown

Soon after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, an incident occurred in the town of Konskie in which a number of Poles were massacred by German soldiers in reprisal for Polish partisan attacks on Germans. Photographs were taken, one showing the bodies of the murdered Poles lying on the ground. Also present in Konskie that day was a uniformed woman in charge of a German "documentary" film crew. She was Leni Riefenstahl, then thirty-seven years old and well known as Hitler's favored filmmaker. A photograph was taken of her, too.

These photographs taken at Konskie haunted Riefenstahl after the war when she was accused of being an eye-witness to Nazi atrocities. Although a German de-Nazification tribunal cleared her of this charge, she was so tainted by her association with Hitler and other Nazi leaders that she found it impossible to resume her career as a filmmaker. *Tiefland*, which she had been working on intermittently during the war and released finally in 1954, was her last film. She survived the difficult postwar years through one expedient after another and went on to make a brief splash as a stills photographer of certain African tribes. In 1987, aged eighty-five, she published her memoirs in Germany. These were translated anonymously and published in Britain in 1992 under the title *The Sieve of Time*. They have now been published in the United States as *Leni Riefenstahl: A Memoir.*

In these pages, Riefenstahl explains why she was in Konskie that day in September 1939 and how the photograph of her came to be taken. It is one of many instances where she has found it necessary to justify, correct, refute, or excuse something about her past. But she gives no hint that she is aware of the irony that she, whose reputation among cinéastes rests on so-called "documentaries," should find herself trapped by a visual document. In part her book is an attempt to score off what she terms her "enemies," writers like Susan Sontag who have identified Nazi aesthetic themes in the photographs of her post-Hitler career. Alert readers are unlikely to find her explanations convincing.

Riefenstahl's book is very long and repeats much of what she has told about herself before in one form or another. Its narrative follows the arc of her long and turbulent life from its petit-bourgeois beginnings in the Kaiser's Germany (she was born in 1902) to its long downhill love affair with Africa. (She says she'd like to settle in Africa among the simple mud huts and naked people, but

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the rains and mosquitoes make it impossible.) As active in the latter half of her life as in her prime, she has survived through single-minded concentration on her own interests and through remarkable physical stamina. In her youth she was photogenic, with a good face and figure, and many men were attracted to her. But it does not seem that people liked her, apart from Hitler, nor will most readers find her self-portrait appealing.

The relationship with Hitler is the centerpiece of her book. Spread out over some two hundred pages, this is the fullest account Riefenstahl has yet given of it. She takes us from the day she first met Hitler in early 1932 to the final moments of the war, when, at the very end of April 1945, trying to hide herself away in Austria, she heard of his death ("A chaos of emotions raged in me. I threw myself on the bed and wept all night"). In the course of these pages Riefenstahl introduces us to the top Nazis and her work on the films that made her famous. It is this section of the book that the publishers must hope will attract readers.

Riefenstahl began her life in public as a dancer. When a knee injury threatened her future in this field, she turned to films. She was attracted to mountain films, a genre made popular in Germany by Arnold Fanck. In 1926 she appeared in her first film, *The Holy Mountain*, under Fanck's direction. Several others followed. Having learned from Fanck how films were made she then turned herself to directing. In 1932 she released *The Blue Light*, her first film as a director, a fable set in the Italian Dolomites.

Fanck, it seems, required performances upon rocks and ski slopes, the more dangerous the better, but not acting. Riefenstahl's "dancing" in *The Holy Mountain* is awful beyond belief. If it is true that Hitler found this dance the most beautiful thing he ever saw in a film, as Riefenstahl reports him saying, we can understand how the artistic tastes of these two drew them together. *The Blue Light* is nearly as awful. But Hitler, Riefenstahl says, admired this film too. It was another bond between them.

According to Riefenstahl, it was she who initiated contact with Hitler. Soon after completing *The Blue Light*, she found herself attending a rally at which Hitler spoke, during one of the election campaigns that marked the last year of the Weimar Republic. So smitten was she by his performance, she wrote to him. Hitler at once invited her to meet him at Wilhelmshaven, on the North Sea coast.

Riefenstahl's description of this first meeting sets the tone for what follows. It's as if she is imagining herself in a film with Hitler as her co-star and her book the draft of its screenplay.

Hitler takes a break from his campaigning to walk with her on the beach. They talk about films. Hitler persuades her to stay for dinner: "I seldom get the chance to speak to a real artist." They walk some more on the beach, and he speaks passionately about his mission to save Germany:

> We walked silently, side by side until, after a long silence, he halted, looked at me, slowly put his arms around me, and drew me to him. I had certainly not wished for such a development. He stared at me in some excitement but when he noticed my lack of response he instantly let go and turned away. Then I saw him raise his hands beseechingly: "How can I love a woman until I have completed my task?" Bewildered, I made no reply and, still without exchanging a word, we walked back to the inn; there, somewhat distantly, he said, "Good night." I felt that I had offended him and regretted that I had come in the first place.

Her regrets notwithstanding, Riefenstahl lost no opportunity to exploit this all-important connection. When Hitler became Chancellor, he asked her to make films for the Nazi cause. Riefenstahl has always made a point of stressing that her obligations in this matter were to Hitler personally, as if this made a difference to her moral situation. Though she says she tried to resist Hitler, in the end she could not refuse to do as he asked. (Riefenstahl throughout portrays herself as the reluctant victim of circum-

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stances. When things go wrong for her, it is always someone else's fault.) Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief, was now in charge of all media activity in Germany, including film. In Riefenstahl's scenario, he made life as difficult as he could for her, while losing no opportunity to try to seduce her.

In short order, Riefenstahl then made three films featuring Hitler's Nazi rallies at Nuremberg, those of 1933, 1934, and 1935. They were given the same titles as the rallies themselves: *Victory of Faith*, *Triumph of the Will*, and *Day of Freedom: Our Werhmacht*. Hitler gave a reception for each one in turn. In 1936, Riefenstahl was contracted to film the Olympic Games, due to be held that year in Berlin. The assignment was backed by the Nazi government and it occupied her until the spring of 1938, when she released her film in two parts: *Olympia: Festival of Nations* and *Olympia: Festival of Beauty*. Hitler again attended its première, a gala affair which was held, at Riefenstahl's suggestion, on his forty-ninth birthday. She then toured Europe with the film, turning it into a propaganda triumph for the Nazi government. When she came to the United States, however, she found her films boycotted.

Of these four films that Riefenstahl made under Hitler's auspices, the first has apparently disappeared. The others, however, are available in video format in the United States, and two of them, *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia*, are highly regarded in some film circles. To view them afresh after reading Riefenstahl's book makes one doubly alert to the fraudulent nature of the narrative she's now published. The films were, of course, designed as propaganda for Hitler's government, and they betray this motivation in the most obvious manner. In her book, however, as in the many interviews she's given since the war, Riefenstahl sets out to portray herself as a pure documentary filmmaker, one who was ignorant of politics and had to fight to preserve her integrity as an artist. Regrettably, many in academia and the media have aided and abetted her in this fiction.

We may surmise that to picture herself as one who, yes, was captivated by Hitler's magnetic personality and so "had no choice" but to submit to his will, but who knew nothing of what the Nazis were up to, was an alibi suggested to Riefenstahl by another Hitler favorite, Albert Speer, his wartime Minister of Armaments. As the designer of the Nuremberg tableaux that Riefenstahl captured on film, Speer was Riefenstahl's close collaborator in the production of both *Victory of Faith* and *Triumph of the Will*. His hand was also to be seen in the props and staging of the Olympic Games in Berlin.

Speer escaped the gallows at the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal by inventing what the German historian Matthias Schmidt has called "the most cunning apologia by any leading figure of the Third Reich." He presented himself as a non-political technocrat, at heart a decent man, who in an honest spirit of contrition accepted his part in Hitler's government, but who was ignorant of the atrocities that others committed. Building on this self-portrait in his writings, and thanks to a successful television mini-series based on them, Speer's popular image was elevated from the Chamber of Horrors, where it rightly belonged, to the Hall of Fame. Was it from Speer, one wonders, that Riefenstahl got the idea of devising a similar script to account for her own carryings-on in the Third Reich, perhaps hoping for a mini-series of her own?

Speer flits in and out of Riefenstahl's narrative and is portrayed by her always as a friend and ally right up to the end of the war. Within days of his release from Spandau prison in 1966, where he served the twenty-year sentence handed down by the allied court, Speer wrote to Riefenstahl suggesting they meet. Later, they spent five weeks walking together in the Dolomites, the location of many of Riefenstahl's mountain films. In these airy surroundings, the two survivors of the debacle of Hitler's Germany talk about the past. It is typical of Riefenstahl's memoirs that we learn nothing of substance about these conversations. The set and the actors are there, but the scene is trivialized.

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As a literary performance, then, it must be said that Riefenstahl's book is on a par with her dancing. Her style, like Speer's, tends always toward melodrama and cheap sentiment. It exemplifies that form of kitsch that the Israeli historian Saul Friedländer has found both in Nazi art generally and in many postwar attempts to recapture its spirit. The passage quoted above in which Riefenstahl describes her first meeting with Hitler is a typical example of this style. But it is the same whether she writes of her lovers, or of her wartime marriage to an army officer, or of the Nazi inner circle. Hitler is the dictator of Germany, holding absolute power in his own person, preparing to unleash upon the world the most terrible forces of destruction. But his actions, on which the fate of millions depends, fade into the background to be replaced by moments of quiet intimacy with a talented young woman, Leni Riefenstahl. The Führer and she are fellow artists, she woos him with films in which he stars famously, he gives her lilacs, roses, a Meissen alarm clock. She visits him in the Reich Chancellery; they go on picnics; she's invited to lunch, "the only woman at the big luncheon table." In Berlin, he comes by her apartment; in Munich, she visits his apartment. On occasions she's invited to the Berghof, his mountain aerie, which inspires him to talk about religion. Christmas often finds Hitler feeling lonely. Riefenstahl comes round for a private chat.

> Trying to change the subject, I asked Hitler, "How did you spend Christmas Eve?" There was sadness in his voice: "I had my chauffeur drive me around aimlessly, along highways and through villages, until I became tired." I looked at him, amazed. "I do that every Christmas Eve." After a pause: "I have no family and I am lonely."
>
> "Why don't you get married?"
>
> "Because it would be irresponsible of me to bind a woman in marriage."

It's all a smokescreen, the stuff of supermarket tabloids. But suddenly the smoke clears, we've arrived at September 1939, and Riefenstahl is in the Reichstag listening to Hitler announce the outbreak of war. She at once offers herself for "combat reporting." Within days of the Nazi attack on Poland, she has organized her film crew, obtained uniforms from the army, and rushed to the front line. Commanding generals, knowing who is her protector, point her forward to Konskie. There she is photographed and the incident occurs which causes her difficulty after the war. Riefenstahl says this incident made her abandon all wish to serve the war effort in her capacity as filmmaker. Nevertheless, she flies in a military plane from the Konskie front to Danzig, where she sits on Hitler's left at the celebratory luncheon given for senior officers. Soon after she flies to Warsaw, where her film crew records Hitler's review of the Wehrmacht's victory parade.

What does Riefenstahl expect her readers to make of this episode? Does she really think it has no greater moral significance than the name-dropping, gossip, and B-movie dialogue that fill most of her book? How could she be so close to the front line, so close to Hitler in his triumphal march across Europe, if she were not an ardent supporter of the Nazi cause? But the smokescreen quickly descends again. In *Tiefland*, a sappy story that was a popular opera in Berlin in the Twenties, Riefenstahl found another idealized image of Hitler. Working on this project provided her with a cover for whatever else she and her companies were doing for the war effort. By the time of her last meeting with Hitler, at the Berghof in 1944, she says, "I no longer believed in a German victory." It was time to invent a different future for herself.

Riefenstahl's book, like her films, depicts the moral universe in which many Germans lived and worked in the Nazi era. If it were not for the symbiotic relationship between Hitler, herself, and her films, it's hard to believe her memoirs would attract a publisher. But the relationship certainly existed, if not exactly in the form she now presents it, and her films still circulate. Her book complements them. It is authentic at least in this

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respect: in it we hear again the voice of an unrepentant Hitlerite. His only fault was that he lost the war.

Mann & boy

Frederic Tuten
Tintin in the New World: A Romance.
Morrow, 239 pages, $22

reviewed by Clarence Brown

Frederic Tuten's new fiction is precisely what Flann O'Brien said that the modern novel should be: a self-evident sham. Everything about the physical book, from the clear plastic jacket to the original Roy Lichtenstein frontispiece to the breathless blurbs, bespeaks its status as authentic bogus, the very imago of New York postmodernism: unassailably chic and incoherently hip.

Though the name Tuten looks like the triliteral root that engendered the character Tintin, the eponym is in fact the work of another man's imagination. The Belgian Georges Remi (1907–1983), who built his *nom de plume* Hergé on his reversed initials, R.G., was one of the greatest of comic-strip artists.

Though I am almost exactly the same age as Tintin, he did not form a part of my early pantheon of Krazy Kat, Dick Tracy, Alley Oop, et al. My Belgian wife soon clued me in, however, and my children grew up with the sort of intimate knowledge of all Tintin's adventures that is today taken for granted, when no child's library is complete without every single one of the some twenty-three albums that compose, along with the still accumulating full edition of "Krazy Kat," one of the very few truly sacred canons of the comic strip.

Jay Cantor's wonderfully appealing novel *Krazy Kat* (1988) appeared while Tuten's romance was gestating with the help of a Guggenheim grant. Neither book is a novelization, to be sure, but Cantor's is a meditation on the actual world of George Herriman, a brilliant further imagining of the Kat, Ignatz, and Pupp into the contemporary world. In Tuten's book, the only part of Hergé's fable that survives is the names: Tintin, the dog Snowy, Captain Haddock, and the estate Marlinspike. The author dedicates his work to "my friend George [*sic*] Remi" and makes grateful acknowledgment to the estate.

The "new world" of the title is South America. Tintin and Haddock are lounging about Marlinspike, at loose ends between adventures (Tintin is forever twelve years old and an investigative reporter), when a mysterious letter arrives—from the late Hergé, one is doubtless meant to understand—directing them to proceed at once to Machu Picchu. When they arrive in Peru they encounter Herr Naptha, Signor Settembrini, Mynheer Peeperkorn (styled "Herr" in this work), and Mme Chauchat, often called "Madame Clavdia," as if she read fortunes in a booth. The pleasant review in *The New York Times* lists these names in its plot summary but does not burden the reader with the further information that they all derive from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), which, as subtext for Tuten's novel, is far more important than the comic strip.

After many gaseous pages of the usual debate between Naptha and Settembrini, which Tuten has ingeniously contrived to make even more tedious than the original, the reader is jolted back to alertness by Tintin's losing his virginity to Mme Chauchat in a primal scene of thoroughly up-to-date explicitness. Children's librarians will wish to examine this with some care. *Après sexe*, the two fall asleep and dream the identical dream of their fantastic future and progeny —as well as those of the dog.

There is an idealistic young indigene, a military officer named Nelson dos Amantes, a fiery advocate of justice for his people. The pattern-searching reader, wondering why Mann's characters are in this novel, will already have assumed that Machu Picchu is standing in for the alp, and then will look further. Is Nelson the counter for Hans Cas-

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torp's doomed cousin Joachim, the Lieutenant? Is Tintin himself Hans Castorp, come to visit his relative but doomed to fall ill and remain as a patient? Tintin does indeed undergo transformations that exceed anything that might have occurred even to the madly comic genius of Mann, but I do not wish to spoil the fun of anyone planning to undertake this fiction. These questions, however, seem dead ends.

Aside from the exasperating tedium of the pure wind that passes for philosophical debate, the chief roadblock to my enjoyment of *Tintin in the New World* is the prose instrument that Tuten devised for its telling. I assume, of course, that this practiced novelist and director of the Graduate Program in Literature and Creative Writing at City College deliberately wrote these words in this order, but had they arrived on the page by inadvertence, the result would have been the same. It is quite simply the worst prose I have encountered outside of an undergraduate setting, and it seems only natural that I should make such a judgment with the gravest misgivings. What am I missing here?

The book rather insists on style as an element. In the opening scene, Tintin is reading a sex-thriller. The longish excerpt shows it to be one of the easiest of literary parodies: a weak solution of Hemingway. The dominant style of this book is a campy sort of fustian, something like the deadpan stagy woodenness of the old "Batman" television series, but it so constantly distorts normal literary idiom that it gives the impression of being not just bad but unconsciously bad. It reaches for rhetorical summits only to collapse in syntactic chaos.

Perhaps, though, it is merely stylishly faux? Perhaps the soft-focus idiom and the speed-blurred syntax are deliberate? Perhaps it is meant to resemble good narrative style only obliquely, the way the costumes in *Men's Fashions of the Times* only allude to actual clothing. Like a staircase in a postmodern building that is first of all "quotation" and then grudgingly a means of ascent, this prose jokingly hints at competent prose, thus somehow overcoming it by condescending to it.

There is nothing wrong with writing an eccentric English, or even with writing "badly." Isaac Babel took risks at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 by slyly regretting the loss under the new regime of the "right to write badly." It is a precious right, of which I regularly avail myself. But the "bad" prose of Henry Green, say, or Donald Barthelme is brilliantly, ingeniously bad, and it delights the reader as much by its send-up of schoolmarm standards as by the supreme skill that produced it, whereas the bad style of Tuten is just helplessly, embarrassingly bad.

It is worse than bad, it is a blunder. What it most resembles is a bad translation, the sort of boner-ridden text typically produced by a writer who is at home in the "from" language but incompetent in the target language. Again and again, it is desperately like the writing of a freshman after his first giddy encounter with Roget: ". . . let them live long and racked in memories of their white plates heaped with tasty . . .[tasty what? The thesaurus gives *food*, *victuals*, *portion*, *serving*, *dish* . . . *Dish!* Precisely the worst option! *Dish* it is!] . . . white plates heaped with tasty dishes." Tuten is the Anti-Flaubert of our time. What troubles me, given the dreadful things that I know, and the even more dreadful things that I suspect, about postmodernism, is that these cavils of mine will be taken as the highest compliments.

There is nothing, I should emphasize, either in the unexceptionable French of Hergé or in the careful English of his translators, Leslie Lonsdale-Cooper and Michael Turner, that provides a model. Only the drunken bombast of Captain Haddock comes close, but I am not speaking here merely of discourse attributed to a character. Authorial speech is as slipshod as all the rest.

Since Haddock's speech provides the best argument for all the grandiloquence manqué, here is a sample of his discourse:

> "By Orion's teeth! I've been boy and man [idiom: man and boy] at sea, kept a narrow 'n'

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> solitary bunk and wished for none else, yet at times, when the sky washed golden and the sea flattened itself level into a plate of blue, when an island loomed like a ripe persimmon on the horizon, I sometimes wished my briny soul softened by a woman's touch. A girl from home country, I mean, none of your port trollops. Yes. A true country girl! Then she would come and say me [*sic*], 'Oh! Captain, my dear, do come to table.' And there would be waiting my steaming lamb pie and me [*sic*] weather-glass of malt, neat, filled to brim's edge [*sic*]. And this lovely plump, rosy woman, my own wifey [*sic*, I swear], does bend [*sic*] to kiss me on my cheek as I make to tie my napkin 'bout my neck."

In one of the more restrained testimonials on the back cover, Larry McMurtry declares that he "frequently" returns to the book "just to hear the prose again." So do I, since one hearing of such prose is scarcely enough to compel belief.

But that was a character speaking. Here is authorial discourse:

> Before yet further adventures ensued, the meal was pronounced over, done, finished, quite. Everyone agreed, Tintin as well, that a stroll was in order, an excursion at once touristical and tonic over the hills and declivities of the Inca ruins.

Not even Lowe-Porter's airless imitation of the great granite paragraphs of Mann himself could prepare one for anything quite so awful. After two hundred pages of this, backward reels the asphyxiated ear to mind's end.

Here is Tintin:

> "I'm honored, Monsieur Peeperkorn, yet as to the advice you seek, I'm certainly not qualified to render neither you nor any artist such service."

How are we to take this? Is the amateurish solecism ("neither . . . nor" after a negative, instead of "either . . . or") a deliberate undercutting of the priggish blather in which Tintin is forced to speak? Or is it merely another of the myriad of lapses, such as Place des "Vogges" (for "Vosges"), "vorspeis" (frequently, for "Vorspeise"), and so on?

There are paragraphs here and there of effective writing. One entire chapter (a "chapter" here can be anything from a few lines to nearly fifty interminable pages), devoted to the interior monologue of the noble Lieutenant, is written in highly competent language. It is a sort of supertext on Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," which might have lent a modicum of backbone to the prose.

The blurbs on the back cover of *Tintin in the New World* are so extravagant in their praise that they struck me at first as being part of the general blague. "A masterpiece. The prose is exquisite. The diction is perfect. Just the novel to be the vanguard of 21st-century fiction." And "I cannot begin to express my joy with Frederic Tuten's superb novel . . ." But the blurbists, far from being fictional characters transported across national boundaries and impressed into service, are actual writers and critics of considerable distinction: not only Larry McMurtry but also Susan Sontag ("I love the way the novel deepens as it goes, the music of it . . ."), Oscar Hijuelos, Leslie Marmon Silko, Walter Mosley, and Eric Kraft ("Not since *One Hundred Years of Solitude* . . .").

I take their opinions with the utmost seriousness and am more depressed than ever. Perhaps this really is the vanguard of twenty-first-century fiction, a foretaste of what will pass in that age for exquisite prose, perfect diction.

The novel ends on a note of harmony so serene that the words on the page seem to be drops of nectar on a web of spun sugar. Tintin, all but etherialized, walks about the rain forest teaching vegetarianism to the jaguars and conservationism to the loggers, "addressing the men during siesta on the virtues of the noble, stately trees." (One yearns for the camera to pan even momentarily for a reaction shot to the loggers, but it does not.) Dogs, with whom he has a special relation-

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ship, "greet him in the villages, barking an exultant howl [*sic*], and rush among themselves . . ." Finally, too pure for this fallen world, Tintin takes off his clothes, and becomes, like the perfect weenie into which he has evolved, one with everything.

Two types of austerity

Robert Layton Sibelius.
Schirmer Books, 247 pages, $30

Paul Griffiths Stravinsky.
Schirmer Books, 253 pages, $30

reviewed by James F. Penrose

The lives and work of Jean Sibelius and Igor Stravinsky are studies in contrasting styles. Sibelius (1865–1957) was born in a land with an impoverished, if not lost, musical tradition, spoke Swedish as his mother tongue, lived in a country that was an autonomous duchy of the Tsarist empire, and looked to a German as his musical and personal model. Out of this patchwork, Sibelius created and sharply defined an entire Finnish school based on his profound identification with nature and a preoccupation with folklore and myth. By contrast, Stravinsky (1882–1971) came from a rich musical heritage but turned against much of that background, creating or reinterpreting several musical styles ranging from primitivism to an elegantly violent neoclassicism, to a muted serialism.

Yet these two original composers have common touchstones. Each was in his own way deeply religious, and each depended heavily on the motivating power of legend: for Sibelius it was the Kalevala, that great repository of Finnish folklore; for Stravinsky it was Russian folktales, Greek myth, and the Bible. Sibelius and, for the most part, Stravinsky were tonal composers: even late in life, when Stravinsky hit his stride as a serialist, he remained conservative in approach. "I am on my guard against counterfeit money," he said, "and take care not to accept it for the true coin of the realm." Their most obvious difference is their musical syntax: like Alkan and Shostakovich, Sibelius was at ease with musical convention, employing traditional musical language in an utterly novel and characteristic fashion throughout his life, while Stravinsky had his hand in many musical candy jars, each jar being very much of his own design.

The two books under review are the latest in the *Master Musicians* series, which has been ongoing for many years. Published originally in England by Dent and now available here from Schirmer, this important series has recently included a splendid volume on Liszt as well as volumes on Vivaldi and Elgar. In his *Sibelius*, Robert Layton, formerly a member of the BBC music staff, has written an exemplary book organized into biographical and analytical sections. Having first appeared in 1965, the book is now in its third edition. It is full of engaging insight and is marked with consideration for and understanding of its complex and troubled subject. Even when Erik Tawaststjerna's exhaustive biography of Sibelius is fully translated, Layton's work will no doubt remain one of the more accessible routes to the composer in English.

Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, in December 1865. His father, an army doctor, died when Sibelius was only three, and the child was raised by his mother and female relatives. He grew up speaking Swedish but early on his mother enrolled him in the Hämeenlinna Suomalainen Normaalilyseo, a Finnish-language preparatory school. Layton points out that this early acquaintance with the national tongue was crucial to Sibelius's musical development, eventually exposing him as it did to the Kalevala. Layton tells us that Sibelius's musical training paralleled his linguistic experience; though he began on the piano, the violin came to supplant his first instrument. Although Sibelius started formal instruction on the violin extremely late, by his early twenties he had a good, if not first-rate, technique. This, together with his acquain-

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tance and friendship with the great pianist Ferrucio Busoni, persuaded Sibelius that a virtuoso career was unlikely. His disposition was also a hindrance: when nervous, Sibelius developed a visible tremor accompanied by the singularly unpleasant sensation of a metallic taste in the mouth. Layton notes that these symptoms manifested themselves later in life when Sibelius had to meet with his bank-manager creditor—which he did often, as he enjoyed socializing and drinking (routinely to excess).

Sibelius's compositional prowess was altogether more potent than his virtuosity, and Layton leads us through the rapid maturation of Sibelius's orchestral technique. Before his first orchestral work, *Kullervo*, Sibelius had composed only a few small-scale piano and chamber works. He began sketching *Kullervo* only a year before its first performance in 1892. It was followed shortly by *En Saga*, *Karelia*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, and the *Four Legends*. By his thirty-second year, Sibelius was awarded a government pension that ultimately permitted him to give up teaching and devote himself entirely to composition.

From 1899 to 1929, Sibelius's career was in full flower and he completed, on average, a major work each year. The second, analytical, half of Layton's book describes in more technical detail the seven symphonies, symphonic poems, theater music, songs, and the Violin Concerto, which were all completed during the long, cool summer of Sibelius's creative life. By 1929, Sibelius had said all that he wanted to say to the world. Though he lived another twenty-eight years, he never published anything after the *Four Songs*, opus 119. Always hypercritical of his works, he apparently burned his Eighth Symphony along with at least one other major work. While Layton admits that Sibelius was capable of writing music that was far removed from the quality of austere masterpieces such as the Fourth and Seventh symphonies or the astonishing *Tapiola*, his "warts-and-all" approach is tempered by his respect and affection for the composer. Layton leaves the reader with a strong sense of the peculiar emotion underlying Sibelius's remote and haunting aural presence.

The genius of Igor Stravinsky was of altogether another sort. While he composed in various styles throughout his long life, his middle works exhibit a characteristic patina of sophistication which effectively sets off passages of acute poignancy. The clash of opposites in Stravinsky's style is only made possible by his ability to synthesize these seemingly irreconcilable elements into cool and unadorned music of great beauty.

Stravinsky is perhaps the most written-about composer of our time, thanks in no small part to the writer and conductor Robert Craft, Stravinsky's amanuensis, collaborator, and legatee. Stravinsky himself was an excellent writer who made a much stronger appeal for his own works and aesthetics than does Paul Griffiths, sometime music critic for *The Times* of London and now ensconced at *The New Yorker*. Griffiths's book is difficult reading, encumbered as it is by loads of arcane references to "guyed banal patterns," "melodic writing suggestive of Schoenbergian octave displacement," "the establishing of a new rhythmic unit within a senescent meter," and so forth. Chapter endings are particularly burdened with this sort of prose, often in pursuit of some far-flung hermeneutic speculation. One wonders what Stravinsky, who had a horror of pretentiousness, would have thought of such language.

Stravinsky was born in the coastal town of Oranienbaum, not far from St. Petersburg, where his father was a bass at the Maryinsky Theater. While he started piano lessons when he was nine, Stravinsky's obsession with meter and rhythm began much earlier, as he himself suggests in this charming though curious passage from his autobiography, *Chroniques de ma vie*:

> I can see it now. An enormous peasant seated on the stump of a tree. The sharp resinous tang of fresh-cut wood in my nostrils. The peasant simply clad in a short red shirt. . . .

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> He was dumb, but he had a way of clicking his tongue very noisily. . . . To amuse [the children], he would begin to sing. This song was composed of two syllables, the only ones he could pronounce. They were devoid of any meaning, but he made them alternate with incredible dexterity in a very rapid tempo. He used to accompany this clucking in the following way: pressing the palm of his right hand under his left armpit, he would work his left arm with a rapid movement, making it press on the right hand. From beneath the red shirt he extracted a succession of sounds which were somewhat dubious but very rhythmic, and which might be euphemistically described as resounding kisses. This amused me beyond words, and at home I set myself with zeal to imitate this music—so often and so successfully that I was forbidden to indulge in such an indecent accompaniment.

Stravinsky was one of a long list of deracinated Russians. His rootlessness began in 1910 when Sergei Diaghilev asked him to write *The Firebird* for the Russian Ballet's spring season in Paris. Thereafter, Stravinsky moved frequently, seemingly bored by the security offered by geographic and cultural familiarity. His last move was on March 29, 1971, when he took a new apartment in New York, dying there on April 6. Even *post mortem*, Stravinsky remained restless, shuttling one last time across the Atlantic, to his grave in Venice.

Even in terms of musical description, an area of expertise that must be within the job description of any music critic, Griffiths remains relentlessly ponderous. One is at pains to realize from the book that *The Firebird* was a work of considerable musical brilliance, characterized by highly imaginative use of dissonance and tonal color and, of course, a compulsive rhythmic drive. More success was to follow: *Petrouchka*, ruefully and proudly described by its author as "a bizarre piece," was produced in 1911 with huge success. In 1913, perhaps the most famous composition of the twentieth century, *Le Sacre du printemps* (or, as one unkind critic termed it, *Le* Massacre *du printemps*), appeared to tumultuous reception. Riots literally broke out at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées.

Few works in the history of music have created more furor than these three early ballets, with their polytonalities, dissonances, and biting rhythms. Griffiths pays this drama little heed. Stravinsky, on the other hand, put his case in characteristically lucid fashion:

> The tone of . . . the Rite may have appeared arrogant, the language that it spoke may have seemed harsh in its newness but that in no way implies that it is revolutionary. . . .
>
> If one only need break a habit to merit being labeled revolutionary, then every musician who has something to say and in order to say it goes beyond the bounds of established convention would be known as revolutionary. . . .
>
> Art is by essence constructive. Revolution implies a disruption of equilibrium. To speak of revolution is to speak of temporary chaos. Now art is the contrary of chaos. It never gives itself up to chaos without immediately finding its living works, its very existence, threatened.

In short, Stravinsky was doing no more than any creative artist. When the prescient Diaghilev declared in 1905 that "we are witnesses of the greatest summing-up in history, in the name of a new and unknown culture, which will be created by us and which will also sweep us away," he put his finger on the true cause of the uproar.

After the First World War, Stravinsky's style took on a bleaker quality. During this brief period, he composed *L'Histoire du soldat*, *Le Renard*, and *Mavra*. But in the charming *Pulcinella* of 1920, Stravinsky found a new voice, that of neoclassicism, which was to serve him on and off for a generation. While *The Firebird*, *Petrouchka*, and the *Rite* are still the best known of Stravinsky's works, the Octet, the Piano Concerto, the gorgeous *Appolon Musagète*, the somberly liturgical

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Oedipus Rex, and the witty *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto, all belonging to this fertile and serene period, are works of at least equal appeal. In *Oedipus Rex*, Stravinsky treats the human voice as another instrument, with its own sound and rhythm, while deliberately de-emphasizing, if not eliminating, all traces of verbal meaning—not unlike the red-shirted peasant's song.

Upon fleeing Europe at the outset of the Second World War, Stravinsky settled in the United States, where he took citizenship in 1945. He was also preparing to change style again, this time with the extraordinary opera *The Rake's Progress*. And yet again: in his ballet *Agon*, Stravinsky took his first steps in the twelve-tone technique used by Arnold Schoenberg. Griffiths tells us that Schoenberg thought little of Stravinsky and parodied his neoclassicism in the second of the *Three Satires*, opus 27, by describing the "little Modernsky"'s (i.e., Stravinsky's) coif as resembling "quite the little Bach" and by rendering this peculiar jape in stringent dodecaphonic form.

Stravinsky was sensitive to accusations that he was a master of many styles but never of his own. In his autobiography, he claimed that the public was unwilling to follow the progress of his musical thought. Years later, Glenn Gould responded by saying that "he has accepted and loved and adopted many things in sequence and without discrimination and he has never been able to find, apart from this constant transition of fleeting identification, the real personality of Igor Stravinsky. This, of course, is tragic."

Paul Griffiths's sterile approach will not attract musically inclined readers who, having heard Stravinsky's music, may be interested in learning more about the composer and his works. Only the most determined cognoscenti will hack through the thick underbrush of Griffiths's prose and confront the veiled references and *ex cathedra* judgments that abound in this work. In their clarity and style, Stravinsky's own writings remain much better explications of his music and aesthetics.

The imaginative invalid

Ian Bell Dreams of Exile.
Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography.
Holt, 296 pages, $25

reviewed by Alan Rutenberg

In September 1884, Henry James published his famous essay "The Art of Fiction" in *Longman's Magazine*; the following December, in response to James, Robert Louis Stevenson published "A Humble Remonstrance" in the same journal. This exchange initiated a profound and spirited friendship which flourished despite the quite different, highly articulate aesthetic sensibilities of the two writers. As Leon Edel writes in his biography of James, "[t]hey had in common their devotion to style, their love of words and wit, their ranging imaginations. Stevenson appreciated to the full the deliberate artistry of Henry; Henry enjoyed Stevenson's flair for vivid storytelling." In the first letter of their remarkable correspondence, collected in a fine edition by Janet Adam Smith, James wrote to Stevenson, in reply to "A Humble Remonstrance": "It's a luxury, in this immoral age, to encounter some one who *does* write—who is really acquainted with that lovely art." This polished biography of Robert Louis Stevenson, by Ian Bell, a young Scottish literary journalist, describes a writer exuberantly devoted to the art of fiction and to the craft of English prose. Anticipating the 1994 centenary of Stevenson's death, Bell has written a modest, intelligent, yet enthusiastic narrative of a life which was, in the resonant phrase of Henry James, "as strange and romantic as one of his fables."

Unlike academic critics who have worried that the romance of Stevenson's life distracts attention from his work, Bell celebrates the romantic stamp of the Stevenson legend: the industrious yet bohemian aesthete and traveler who conducted a constant quarrel with illness, especially with that specifically romantic disease, tuberculosis. According to Bell, "the legend and the work are elements

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not easily separated, nor should they be: most of the legend is fact. Louis the man—mercurial, charming, daring, dying—is the troublesome core." In contrast to academic taste, Bell admires Stevenson as an artist who created stories of broad public appeal and sustained currency. Bell asserts: "He was a popular artist: the conjunction has become rare."

Since the publication of a lucid critical study by the eminent literary scholar and Scotsman David Daiches in 1947, academic treatments of Stevenson have devoted most attention to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, and the uncompleted *Weir of Hermiston*, and considerably less to the immensely popular tales *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. While Bell fully acknowledges Stevenson's literary achievements, for him "[t]he point in writing about Stevenson is to give an account of a man who printed a handful of narratives upon the popular imagination."

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in 1850 in Edinburgh into a family formed by the strict certainties of Calvinist and Victorian Scotland. Stevenson's father continued an illustrious and prosperous family tradition in engineering, particularly in the construction of Scotland's lighthouses, and he expected his only child to adhere equally to the family profession and to his own melancholy Calvinist beliefs; his mother was also from a family eminent among the rising professional classes of Edinburgh, but she was often ill and was a much smaller figure in his life. Stevenson's childhood consisted of a long series of illnesses; he required a nurse, Alison Cunningham, who, writes Bell, was "the first of a group of strong, mature women" who dominated Stevenson but also animated his imaginative life; though rigidly devout and superstitious, she read Stevenson the popular penny-papers as well as the Bible and Bunyan. Stevenson's youthful education was sporadic, often disrupted by illness, both his own and his mother's, and by prescribed travel south in Europe. This prescription was repeated throughout his life.

At sixteen, with a literary sensibility already developed through the eclectic reading of an invalid and traveler, Stevenson entered Edinburgh University as an obedient student of engineering. Later, in a fruitless compromise with his father, he studied law. Two individuals nevertheless provided encouragement for his literary aspirations. The first was a bohemian companion: Stevenson's older cousin Bob, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, his childhood playmate and now a Cambridge graduate ambitious to become a painter, who represented the serious possibility of a revolt. The second was a muse: Mrs. Frances Sitwell, an intelligent, literary beauty twelve years his senior, with whom Stevenson had an unconsummated affair for two years. Her "official" admirer was Sidney Colvin, the newly appointed Slade Professor at Cambridge, who embraced Stevenson and became his conduit to the literary circles of London. After illness had repeatedly interrupted his university education and forced Stevenson south, most often to France, his father finally enabled him to pursue a literary career.

In a famous passage, Stevenson describes his early apprenticeship, as an essayist, in the craft of prose:

> I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey-tricks, which was called "The Vanity of Morals"; it was to have had a second part "The Vanity of Knowledge"; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghost-like, from its ashes) no less than three times: first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne.

Bell comments: "He chose to begin—and it is not a bad tactic—as a craftsman before he contemplated becoming an artist." Daiches offers a rather more persuasive view: "He

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came to literature with too many words and too few insights, and it took time for his insights to catch up with his technique . . . Stevenson wholly achieved this balance only in his last, unfinished work."

In July of 1876, Stevenson, accompanied by his cousin Bob, visited for the second time the artist's colony at Fountainbleau, faded after its recent fame as the home of the Barbizon painters. There he met Frances Vandegrift Osbourne, known as Fanny, an American woman ten years his senior. Married with two children and seeking a divorce from her husband in San Francisco, she had artistic pretensions as a painter and her own bohemian sensibility. In a series of four essays written in 1877 and collected under the title *Virginibus Puerisque* ("Of Youths and Maidens"), Stevenson contemplated the prospect of marriage to Fanny. By August 1878, when Fanny returned to California, their fairly scandalous courtship had become public.

Richard Holmes, in his *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, offers a brilliant reading of Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, a journal of the fall of 1878, as a record of Stevenson's further consideration of marriage. Writes Holmes: "The true threat of marriage, as he saw it, came down finally to this: that it would kill the boy in him." In a suggestive formulation, Holmes concludes that Stevenson resolved the question of marriage by recognizing in Fanny a fellow bohemian and therefore an admirable adventure companion.

Controversy persists about the character and influence of Fanny. A quite negative view of her, which questions her responsibility, loyalty, and affection, is expressed in another new Stevenson biography by Frank McLynn, but that view relies on largely discredited sources. Bell himself provides a credible, reasonably balanced, but finally favorable report.

Stevenson and Fanny were married in San Francisco in May 1880, and they soon returned to the literary world of London. During their years in London, still punctuated by journeys south, Fanny remained a force in favor of stories and adventure, while Stevenson's London circle, which included Sidney Colvin and Edmund Gosse, perceived him as an essayist and a conventional Victorian man of letters. His friendship with Henry James, which commenced in 1885, provided welcome attention to the art of fiction.

Stevenson had his first success with the publication of *Treasure Island* in 1883. In 1886, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* appeared, with important assistance from Fanny, who discerned the shape of an allegory in the raw dream material Stevenson had reported. In the same year Stevenson published *Kidnapped*. When his father died, also in 1886, leaving him a modest sum, his life assumed a new direction.

The period of travel between 1887 and Stevenson's death in 1894 represents to Bell a bohemian "exile" still freighted with nostalgia for Scotland. In 1887 Stevenson traveled to America, and soon began a Scottish historical novel, *The Master of Ballantrae*. He was accompanied by his mother, by Fanny and her son Lloyd, and by his fame as an increasingly popular writer. At the invitation of an American publisher who proposed a series of dispatches from a long Pacific cruise, Stevenson and his family sailed from San Francisco in June 1888.

Stevenson had a serious case of tuberculosis throughout his adulthood; cities and civilization tended to worsen his condition, while travel and pastoral locations were associated with intermittent periods of health. As Henry James wrote in an essay on Stevenson, "it adds immensely to the interest of volumes through which there draws so strong a current of life to know that they are not only the work of an invalid, but have largely been written in bed, in dreary 'health resorts,' in the intervals of sharp attacks."

Yet travel also reflected the persistent bohemian search for ideal communities, whether an artist's colony or an exotic landscape. Daiches writes: "From the time of his youthful revolt in Edinburgh . . . to his wanderings among the islands of the South

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Seas, Stevenson remained in many important respects an active and conscious bohemian." For Stevenson, the romantic pose of the late-Victorian bohemian was neither political nor anti-intellectual; it required no rebellion against standards of taste and craftsmanship; it represented instead a vision of a life devoted to travel and adventure, to freedom and imagination, and, above all, to art.

After a considerable pilgrimage through the South Seas, in 1890 Stevenson settled in Samoa, where he was soon accorded the respect due a feudal lord. He developed a sympathetic interest in the welfare of the natives and the traditions of their island, both of which were threatened by the economic competition of the imperial powers, and he produced an ambitious work, *A Footnote to History*, on Samoan history and politics. Daiches perceptively considers this moral sense a mature transformation of Stevenson's bohemian sensibility. Stevenson's interest in Samoa parallels his concern with the history of Scotland in his later fiction, including his last novel, *Weir of Hermiston*, which represents an impressive advance. That novel remained incomplete when Stevenson died in Samoa on December 3, 1894, not from tuberculosis but, unexpectedly, from a cerebral hemorrhage.

The place of Stevenson as a writer remains unsettled, in part because his voluminous collected works include highly regarded stories, essays, travel writing, and children's verse in addition to his novels. Bell appeals to George Steiner, who places Stevenson with Kleist, Poe, Leskov, and Mérimée as the "last of the pure story-tellers." Vladimir Nabokov, who lectured on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, placed it beside the great "fables," including *Dead Souls* and *Madame Bovary*. Richard Holmes more precisely locates Stevenson's books, "with their mixture of boyish adventure and very adult nostalgia," among "a whole tradition of late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction. J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and Rudyard Kipling are all foreseen." There is consensus only that

Statement of ownership, management & circulation

TITLE OF PUBLICATION: The New Criterion.
PUBLICATION NO.: 705590.
DATE OF FILING: September 27, 1993.
FREQUENCY OF ISSUE: Monthly except July and August.
NO. OF ISSUES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY: 10.
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $36.
COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF KNOWN OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 850 Seventh Avenue, Suite 503, New York, N.Y. 10019.
COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF GENERAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF THE PUBLISHER: Same.
FULL NAMES & COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE PUBLISHER, EDITOR & MANAGING EDITOR: *Publisher*: Samuel Lipman, 850 Seventh Avenue, Suite 503, New York, N.Y. 10019; *Editor*: Hilton Kramer, 850 Seventh Avenue, Suite 503, New York, N.Y. 10019; *Managing Editor*: Roger Kimball, 850 Seventh Avenue, Suite 503, New York, N.Y. 10019.
OWNER: Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, Suite 503, New York, N.Y. 10019 (a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public).
KNOWN BONDHOLDERS, MORTGAGES & OTHER SECURITY HOLDERS OWNING OR HOLDING 1 PERCENT OR MORE OF TOTAL AMOUNT OF BONDS, MORTGAGES OR OTHER SECURITIES: None.
FOR COMPLETION BY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AUTHORIZED TO MAIL AT SPECIAL RATES: The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months.
EXTENT & NATURE OF CIRCULATION:
Total no. copies printed:
Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 8,005; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 8,335.
Paid and/or requested circulation:
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 883; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 3,050. 2. Mail subscriptions: Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 3,604; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 4,244.
Total paid and/or requested circulation:
Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 4,487; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 7,294.
Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means (samples, complimentary, and other free copies):
Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 1,056; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 641.
Total distribution:
Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 5,543; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 7,394.
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TOTAL:
Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 8,005; Actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 8,335.
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Stevenson was a great stylist. Note how Henry James congratulated Stevenson on *The Master of Ballantrae*: "a pure, hard crystal, my boy, a work of ineffable and exquisite art."

In Bell's own view, "[t]he real question is why he connected with public taste at such a deep level, why his popularity endures." Stevenson himself supplies one response in his essay "Pastoral":

> Novels thus begin to touch not the fine *dilettanti* but the gross mass of mankind, when they leave off to speak of parlours . . . and begin to deal with fighting, sailoring, adventure, death or child-birth. . . . These aged things have on them the dew of man's morning; they lie near, not so much to us, the semi-artificial flowerets, as to the trunk and aboriginal taproot of the race.

Or as James wrote to Stevenson: "Primitive man doesn't interest me, I confess, as much as civilized—and yet he *does*, when you write about him."

When Stevenson died in 1894, James, noted for the grace of his condolence letters, wrote an especially eloquent letter to Stevenson's widow. "For myself, how shall I tell you how much poorer and shabbier the whole world seems, and how one of the closest and strongest reasons for going on, for trying and doing, for planning and dreaming of the future, has dropped in an instant out of life." James continued: "He lighted up one whole side of the globe, and was in himself a whole province of one's imagination." This biography of Robert Louis Stevenson succeeds not least as an engaging portrait of the artist who inspired such an elegy.

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Notebook

Wharton redux?

by James W. Tuttleton

This past year has been a remarkable period for Edith Wharton revivals, and the variety and quality of the attention that our greatest woman novelist is now receiving says much about cultural life in the United States today. Surely any distinguished recognition of her considerable art is well deserved. Mrs. Wharton's achievement in novels and tales like *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Reef*, *The Custom of the Country*, "Autres Temps . . .", "Roman Fever," and "After Holbein" is without parallel in the sisterhood of American writers. But that in itself does not say enough. Gore Vidal—who usually gets almost everything wrong—remarked a few years ago that Mrs. Wharton and Henry James were our two best novelists. At least in this instance I think he was absolutely right.

How do we treat our two best novelists? One answer is suggested by *Henry James' Midnight Song*, a new novel by Carol De Chellis Hill.[1] In this grim tale set in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Mrs. Wharton and Henry James—along with Fliess, Freud, his patient "Dora," and other real people—are suspects in a gruesome murder mystery involving a missing corpse and dismembered body parts. I do not think Mrs. Wharton would have been amused. Given the indifferent scenic construction and the witless dialogue that she and James are given, Mrs. Wharton would have had plenty of reason to grouse. Miss Hill creates a scene in which the playwright Schnitzler is introduced in order to remark that "No one believes either in himself or in anything else, and in my opinion, they are quite right not to do so." Such might be the watchword of the postmodernist novel. It seems clear that Miss Hill does not believe in much beyond making doubtful use of her betters. Certainly she does not believe in "Henry James" or "Mrs. Wharton" as signs representing real people who once had a life that might still deserve respectful consideration. In the Age of Deconstruction, the death of the author is a given—not just the death of individual persons but also the disappearance of individual genius. Writing, we are told, writes itself, and discourse is merely cultural production, verbiage evacuated by the linguistic system itself. Since anything is a text, why "privilege" our best writers? Why not demystify them, ridicule genius, and in the process make a pretty penny at it?

In all of this Miss Hill is merely recycling what has already become a stale postmodernist convention: the degradation of real people because the writer's imagination isn't equal to inventing a fictive life worth the reader's attention. Doctorow did it in *Ragtime* (1975) with "Freud" and others; Coover did it in *The Public Burning* (1977) with a "Richard Nixon" who is repeatedly sodomized by "Uncle Sam"; Norman Mailer made a habit of it until Alan Lelchuk

1 *Henry James' Midnight Song*, by Carol De Chellis Hill; Poseidon Press, 445 pages, $23.

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wrote a novel called *American Mischief* (1973), which featured a character named "Norman Mailer" who gets shot in the arse. Mailer was not amused and threatened Lelchuk with a lawsuit. I wonder if Miss Hill would be amused if a future novelist concocted a work featuring a "Carol De Chellis Hill" who utters fictional inanities and is degraded in various fictive ways?

Exploiting Mrs. Wharton's distinguished reputation seems to be this year's route to the attention of the public and a little cash besides—riding Edith piggyback, as it were, to the top. One dubious bid for such attention is Marion Mainwaring's version of Mrs. Wharton's novel *The Buccaneers*. This incomplete novel was published posthumously in 1938 by Gaillard Lapsley, her literary executor. It dealt with a bevy of beautiful young girls in the 1870s, Midwestern American daughters of the filthy rich, of parvenu vulgarians who have made a pile but don't know how to spend it. The St. Georges come East hoping to break into an Old New York society that we know from *The Age of Innocence* (1920)—the world of the Archers, the Wellands, and the van der Luydens. But the St. Georges are starchily rebuffed. In the end they go off to London, where the impoverished English aristocracy is readier to lower the drawbridge and smuggle them into the Sacred Citadel—in exchange, of course, for their railroad and real-estate millions.

Mrs. Wharton died before she could conclude *The Buccaneers*, but she left a great many finished chapters, a complete scenario, and polished sections of even partial chapters. All of these make clear how she would have concluded the novel, if she had lived. Some early reviewers, reading what Lapsley presented in 1938, saw in *The Buccaneers* a recovery of Mrs. Wharton's early brilliance in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. Percy Hutchinson, in *The New York Times*, said of the finished sections that "these portions take their place among her best work, cynical, witty, tender and understanding by turns." In the *Herald Tribune*, Christopher Morley advised: "Be not deceived; the great old lady knew precisely and well what she was doing. . . ." The *TLS* said that she "could bring her characters singularly alive, make one *care* what came of and to them, and the gentle malice of her observation, the lightness of her treatment, saved her from more than a glancing charge of taking too seriously the social snobberies which formed so much of her material." But Edmund Wilson—then in his Finland Station *New Republic* anti-snobbish Marxist phase—found Mrs. Wharton's joyful comedy of invading parvenus rather too "mellow": the novel was "banal and a shade trashy."[2]

For most readers, the Lapsley text of *The Buccaneers* has been enough for the purposes of scholarship and the pleasures of literary enjoyment. But no longer. Miss Marion Mainwaring—who a few years ago attained a certain Whartonian notoriety—has now "completed" the novel on her own. Readers may remember that in 1988 Miss Mainwaring trashed—as factually inaccurate—R. W. B. Lewis's Pulitzer Prize–winning biography *Edith Wharton* (1975), some thirteen years after its publication and after she worked on it as Lewis's research assistant. She promised then that both she and his *other* research assistant, Mary Pitlick, would detail Lewis's errors and provide corrections of fact that would finally set straight the biographical record. At the same time she pledged that her forthcoming biography of Morton Fullerton (Edith's grand extramarital passion)—luridly entitled *The Mysteries of Paris*—would displace Lewis's inadequate account of the affair. Some of us felt that her attack on Lewis, so long after his biography was published, was a publicity stunt for her own biography of Fullerton. Was it?[3]

It has now been nearly two decades since the Lewis biography appeared and almost

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2 These comments may be found in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, edited by James W. Tuttleton, Kristin O. Lauer, and Margaret P. Murray (Cambridge University Press, 558 pages, $95).

3 See "The Feminist Takeover of Edith Wharton" in these pages for March 1989.

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six years since Miss Mainwaring leveled her charges at him. Still, there has been no corrigenda—and no sign of *The Mysteries of Paris*. Unable to complete the Fullerton life, she has instead decided to cash in on Wharton by "completing" *The Buccaneers*.[4] A Viking editor, Nan Graham, is said to have taken the novel, in the Mainwaring version, on the premise that it was indeed "trashy." "I thought," Miss Graham told *The New York Observer*, that "that translated into sales." If so, she must not have read the book, and the joke is on Viking. For *The Buccaneers* is not another *Valley of the Dolls* and will not, I am afraid, warrant an illustrated bookcover featuring the muscular Fabio. In any case, Viking appears to have given up on the Fullerton life. The *Observer* reports that, in response to the Mainwaring claim that *The Mysteries of Paris* was nearly finished, "an employee of Viking, which has an option on the book, said, 'We'll believe it when we see it.'" Meanwhile, as to *The Buccaneers*, reviewer Adam Begley has said the last word: "Edith Wharton can't be updated." This month, by the way, will see the appearance of another edition of *The Buccaneers* in which, luckily for us, the editor, Viola Hopkins Winner, will not have presumptuously tampered with the text.[5] Her annotations and emendations should prove fascinating to the generalist and the specialist alike.

The attentive reader will perhaps have detected—in my earlier reference to *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*—that I myself am not guiltless of having contributed to the Wharton revivals now appearing in print and film. This compilation—composed of book reviews of her fiction that appeared in her lifetime—was, alas, not expected to make, and indeed has not made, a public splash (except with a few excitable research librarians). Thus it cannot be said that my co-editors and I have surrendered our inviolable anonymity in exchange for book deals, movie rights, and a spot on "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

Of course the fateful Wharton revival of the year is Martin Scorsese's long-awaited film of *The Age of Innocence*. Viewers with a knowledge of Mr. Scorsese's previous gangster movies, where a number of lowlife mafiosi get shot or dismembered, have been puzzled about his new interest in the high culture of the 1870s. But, judging from *Mean Streets*, *Raging Bull*, *Taxi Driver*, and *Goodfellas*, the people of Mr. Scorsese's underworld know a great deal about the things of Edith Wharton's world. Sicilians mainly, they are obsessed with "family." They know about "honor"; they know that there are "rules" and ways of behaving that show or do not show "respect"; and they know that if you break the rules or dishonor the family or show any disrespect, somebody named Vinny will appear one night and break your legs.

Old New York is not Little Italy, but for Mr. Scorsese the two are not so far apart, either. Edith Wharton's theme, like Martin Scorsese's, is invariably the conflict between the individual appetite and the social will. Mr. Scorsese rightly saw that something of the Sicilian family sense, of the feeling for ritual, and of the connection between emotional violence and the wordless observance of propriety also characterizes Mrs. Wharton's Old New York. He spent more than two years in getting everything right—the high couture, the interior decor, and the manners and mores of wealthy Old New York society in the 1870s. Visually, the work is a spectacle—a colorful Hollywood costume romance re-creating with lavish attention the brownstone world of Delmonico assemblies, Grace Church weddings, and opera evenings at the old Academy of Music. The primary claim of the film of *The Age of Innocence* is that of verisimilitude in all its props.

It must be said at once, however, that there is something emotionally hollow at the

4 *The Buccaneers*, by Edith Wharton, completed by Marion Mainwaring; Viking, 406 pages, $22.

5 *Fast and Loose & The Buccaneers*, by Edith Wharton. Edited, with an introduction, by Viola Hopkins Winner. University Press of Virginia, 514 pages, $49.50; $14.95 paper.

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center of the film. The problem lies in the motivation of character: the springs of feeling are reported rather than shown. This takes the form of Joanne Woodward's narrative voice-over, which continually explains what ought to have been cinematically rendered. The movie follows the novel closely in dealing with a conventional young New Yorker, Newland Archer, who marries an even more conventional young girl, May Welland, whose narrow domestic education has unfitted her to sustain the interest of her husband. Into their lives comes a Europeanized cousin, Ellen, the Countess Olenska, whose aristocratic husband has proved so wicked that a separation is required. Newland and the Countess fall in love; and the question is whether he will abandon his wife and run away with her. There is a great deal of social manipulation behind the scenes, with the matriarchs of the tribe maneuvering to keep Ellen and Newland from consummating an affair and so destroying his marriage, especially as May proves to be pregnant. In the end, the explosive situation is defused: Ellen returns to Europe and Newland remains in New York to ruminate on his lost love and what might have been.

To understand the sense of social solidarity in Old New York takes an effort of the historical imagination. "The 400," as Ward McAllister called them, constituted a pyramid of the four hundred families that could all fit onto the Astors' ballroom floor. Mrs. Wharton invests this group with an inflexible social and moral discipline. They have multiple antennae but a single mind. The social mind is a will to preserve Society as Old New York knows it and to prevent from getting in the vulgarian, the merely rich, and the crude *arriviste*. Yet Madame Olenska has a claim upon them—that of kinship—and clearly they don't know what to do with her. Newland's eye begins to wander when Ellen threatens the scandal of a divorce from the Count. Mrs. Wharton has the family consult the van der Luydens, who function as a kind of *capo di capi*, as to what should be done. The answer is that Archer must be saved from a passional folly brazenly cultivated by the Countess; the marriage and May's child must be protected. The intrusive Madame Olenska, whose spontaneity is indistinguishable from impropriety and whose bohemian style is in itself an affront, must be ejected.

A dinner party is thus arranged for Ellen, a going-away present. Mrs. Wharton writes: "There were certain things that had to be done, and if done at all, done handsomely and thoroughly; and one of these, in the old New York code, was the tribal rally around a kinswoman about to be eliminated from the tribe." The Countess is sauvely eliminated, is surgically excised from Old New York society, and is returned to Europe. Mr. Scorsese found that dinner party fascinating—not a drop of blood was spilled, not a leg broken.

For Mrs. Wharton, I believe, it was just as well that Ellen went back to Europe alone, although this consummation of events is hardly intelligible in the age of Dr. Ruth and Hugh Hefner. Archer, she makes plain, was too dilettantish and conventional to survive a life of dissembling abroad, making the round of bohemian watering holes with a woman not his wife; and the Countess, of course, could not countenance a happiness formed out of a deep wrong to her cousin, the innocent May. Archer, in losing out on the extramarital grand passion, "missed," Mrs. Wharton wrote, "the flower of life." Still, he had its real fruit and substance: a decent marriage with May and a stable family with children. He honors them and his past, twenty-five years later, at the end of the book. The film is faithful to Mrs. Wharton's conclusion in having Newland decline to go up to see Madame Olenska in her Paris apartments. His explanation to his son Dallas for not seeing her—"Say that I'm old-fashioned"—marked for me a beautiful convergence of motivation and feeling, but there were too few of such moments in the film and this powerful scene came too late to redeem the work as a whole.

In part the weakness of this film was the casting. Daniel Day-Lewis—who has proved

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his several talents in *My Left Foot*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*—was, I thought, equal to his part; and Winona Ryder, as May, moved with subtle assurance from initial innocence into a guile so sweet and trusting that she cannot but be victorious when the crisis comes. A very accomplished actress, Michelle Pfeiffer, on the other hand, was wrong for the role of Madame Olenska. Physically, she is not the type for the Countess, and she exhibited none of the mystery of the foreign, the charm of the exotic, which so enchants the insular Archer. Indeed, Miss Pfeiffer—whose credits include *Scarface*, *Married to the Mob*, and *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*—was made to look rather blowzy in certain scenes and exhibited a dissipated look inconsistent with the grace of Mrs. Wharton's most magnetic and sexually alluring woman.[6]

Finally, there was too much attention paid to the set. Someone told Mr. Scorsese that Edith Wharton was "the poet of interior decoration," and he pulled out all the stops in over-decorating the set with her rich Aubasson carpets, daily Jacqueminot roses, Parisian couture, lacquered landaus, polished silver, and sparkling crystal. What is the purpose of all these objects? In Mrs. Wharton's fiction there is no black line that separates character from the objects that surround it. People *are*, in a manner of speaking, their possessions in that they have been chosen to express, illustrate, and manifest an identity—even a corporate social identity like that of Old New York. Character and objects thus flow into and out of each other in the novels and are expressions the one of the other. But in Mr. Scorsese's film the camera is forever zooming in on the dazzle of the dress, the gold head of the cane, the sway of the drape, and the pattern of the china. There are altogether too many multi-course dinners, in which we are made to gaze at length into the plate of oysters or the terrapin soup in the silver tureen. Many of these dinners fail to advance the action or develop character. And the objects at table do not fill in a background but are instead foregrounded by Mr. Scorsese in living spectacular Technicolor. The effect is "gorgeous"—marked, that is, by a garish opulence, a gross extravagance, a repellent conspicuousness of consumption that are in fact more appropriate to Mario Puzo and the *Godfather* movies. But Mrs. Wharton's Old New Yorkers were not Thorstein Veblen's coarse plutocrats and tasteless vulgarians. She is quite explicit about the spartan simplicity and strict economy with which these quiet old burghers lived out their dull and inconspicuous lives.

Mr. Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* is not the first of Mrs. Wharton's novels to be filmed; nor—given her rediscovered costume value—will it be the last. She was held in such high regard, both by the public and the critics, that—after the motion picture became a popular entertainment—options were regularly taken on her novels. From film rights she earned a great deal of money in the Twenties and Thirties, even though the options were not always exercised. Lewis tells us that a six-reeler was made of *The House of Mirth* (1905), though I have not been able to track it down. (It is now the trade gossip that another film of this novel is in the works.) Warner Bros. bought the rights to *The Age of Innocence* early on, but they evidently found the novel not as up-to-date as has Mr. Scorsese. Her novel *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) was filmed in the Twenties with Bebe Daniels, Nita Naldi, and Maurice Costello, with credit for the dialogue going to a newcomer, F. Scott Fitzgerald. A photoplay of *The Children* (1925) was produced in the Twenties under the title *The Marriage Playground*, and indeed my 1928 Grosset & Dunlap reprint of the novel is illustrated with seven stills from the Para-

6 Macmillan Publishers, by the way, wish it to be known that they have reprinted the novel in a 1993 paperback, as a tie-in with the movie and its publicity. The cover of this paperback features a movie still in which the ardor that Newland and Madame Olenska are supposed to feel, during a passionate embrace, is lost in the coarseness of Miss Pfeiffer's unfortunate nictitation.

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mount film. And the movie of *The Old Maid* (1924) featured a sparkling Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins.

Mr. Scorsese, with his $32,000,000 budget and all-star cast, has put into the shade that other new Wharton film of the year, *Ethan Frome*. But to turn from the one to the other is to turn from brownstone wealth and privilege to rural poverty, from the pathos of renunciation to a genuine tragedy of a deep love destroyed. I gather that the film of *Ethan Frome* did not adequately succeed on the cineplex scene and was quickly retired to the video rental shop, where it sits alongside the home video, recently released, of the film of *The Children*.

But to see *Ethan Frome* in connection with Mr. Scorsese's lush romance is to be reminded that less is usually more. In *The Age of Innocence*, Mrs. Wharton writes that the Old New Yorkers never said directly what they thought or felt but communicated only by indirections as unintelligible to outsiders as the ancient hieroglyphics. Mr. Scorsese was, I thought, adept at suggesting how sexual repression inhibited the otherwise articulate Old New Yorkers. But in *Ethan Frome* the problem of communication is rather different. Here her characters are not well-educated New Yorkers communicating by a code but uncommunicative and untalkative New Englanders. In *Ethan Frome* we confront that remarkable laconic terseness of expression, common to Yankees, which still must do adequate service in communicating deep emotion. Since the dialogue is scant, powerful emotion must likewise be conveyed through indirection: stance, expression, look, and gesture.

Joan Allen as Zeena, Liam Neeson as Ethan, and Patricia Arquette as Mattie Silver gave, I thought, compelling performances. The somber mood of the tale was rigorously sustained. Objects in *Ethan Frome*, as expressions of character, were likewise kept to a minimum. A scant broken pickle dish served to say more than the silver salver and the ornate candalabrum in *The Age of Innocence*. And the photographic setting—the stark, barren, snowy landscape of isolated rural Massachusetts—vividly and wordlessly expressed the blocked feeling of these emotionally frozen personalities. The dawning love of Ethan and Mattie, the slow thawing of their feeling for each other—a love that makes life apart from each other more unendurable to them than a passionate death together—is movingly portrayed; and the imprisonment in that decaying old house of the crippled husband, the hypochondriacal wife, and the now ugly, misshapen Mattie is grim in its demonstration that, in Mrs. Wharton's world, life may not grant us even the wished-for death.

How do we treat our best novelists and manifest our care for literary genius? Mrs. Wharton was a private woman who abhorred publicity and kept her intimate life to herself and her closest friends. In January, Irene Worth will violate that privacy by bringing to the stage of the Joseph Papp Public Theater a one-woman presentation based on Mrs. Wharton's writings, letters, and diaries. I have no doubt that much will be made of the dullness of her marriage, the ecstasies of her love affair with Fullerton, and the humiliation of its slow evaporation. As this evening of Edith Wharton will appear in a series that also includes a musical trivializing the presidential wives Eleanor, Jackie, and Mamie—as well as *All for You*, an "interactive performance collage exploring public personae, narcissism and body parts in the age of AIDS"—one may confidently guess that respectful attention to genius is not what Miss Worth is likely to exhibit. I hope to be proven wrong.

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Letters

Who's killing our orchestras?

To the Editors:

Samuel Lipman's attempt to depict the American Symphony Orchestra League as a liberal, PC cabal—the musical equivalent of the MLA—was hilarious ("Who's Killing Our Symphony Orchestras?", September 1993). I sat on one of the panels ("The Orchestra as Music Educator") that helped to write the ASOL study he denigrates; if Lipman could go back in time and sit in that room with us for two days, he'd be ashamed of himself. What Lipman wears so ceremoniously on his sleeve—the love of the greatest works of the repertoire, the imperative of quality and the importance of tradition—the symphony world considers basic and unquestioned, a given.

But I wonder. Would Lipman have us ignore the encroachments of popular culture and contemporary life on our audiences' time and attention, or the slow death of music education in our schools? Would he object to my supplementing five musicians' salaries by tapping non-traditional funding sources for an anti-drug ensemble program in the schools? Presumably, the answer is yes. Out of what motive would Lipman deny us larger, better-educated (not to mention minority) audiences? Perhaps his ideal concert experience is sitting alone.

Christopher D. Guerin
General Manager
Fort Wayne Philharmonic
Fort Wayne, Ind.

Samuel Lipman replies:

It is always a comfort to me to know that my articles are capable of causing a happy state of hilarity, at least in some readers; I hate to think what Mr. Guerin's reaction would be to something really funny. In any case, his letter seems to me a prime example of the stupidity and the lack of musical values that afflict not just the Fort Wayne Philharmonic but also larger and doubtless better orchestras across the country. When Mr. Guerin asks rhetorically whether I would have the Fort Wayne Philharmonic "ignore the encroachments of popular culture and contemporary life on our audiences' time and attention," he full well knows the answer: I would have the orchestra fight those encroachments tooth and claw by not including the meretricious material that the ASOL report advises be used in what once were serious programs. I would instead be certain that the orchestra's programs always make the best case for art as a civilized goal of aspiration by providing an artistic product of the highest possible quality and rigor. I would not remedy the "slow death of music education in our schools" by using a drug-influenced popular culture to teach the noble message of art. I certainly would object to Mr. Guerin's "supplementing five musicians' salaries by tapping non-traditional funding sources for an anti-drug ensemble program in the schools." I can see no value in using Bach and Beethoven as a weapon in the anti-drug war; the proper message of an anti-drug war is that drugs kill, not that art is beautiful. Art has its own reasons for existence, and correcting criminal be-

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havior is not one of them. Finally, Mr. Guerin's mention of "minority audiences," with the usual implied accusation of racism directed against those who disagree with the ASOL party line, is the usual resort of the arts-advocacy scoundrels.

Is art free expression?

To the Editors:
Your editorial report (June 1993) on the Museum of Modern Art's recent event honoring a number of artists and arts advocates for their contributions to freedom of expression sardonically dismisses the notion that denial of government arts funding can ever amount to censorship. What your writer ignores is that the *motivation* for a government action is often a pivotal question in deciding whether that action violates constitutional guarantees.

In the case of Karen Finley and the three other performance artists whose NEA grants were denied in 1990, your reporter neglects to mention that grants to the four were recommended by experts in the field on the basis of artistic merit, and were rejected by then NEA chair John Frohnmayer for political reasons. Your writer is certainly entitled to dispute the artistic merit of Karen Finley and indeed of performance art in general; and had the NEA made its decision on that basis, no one could complain. But manipulating the funding process for partisan, ideological ends violates the First Amendment, as the federal district court in the *Finley* case subsequently ruled.

The same principle applies to a university supported by public funds. Judgments about the academic quality of teaching and scholarship of course must be made, but neither professors nor students can, consistently with constitutional free-speech guarantees, be adversely treated because of purely political considerations.

Your reporter also failed to grasp the gist of attorney Mary Dorman's comments about the NEA at the MOMA event, and her suggestions for written letters to President Clinton *et al.* The point of the letters was to protest the Clinton administration's decision to abandon its campaign position opposing ideological restrictions on arts fundings, and instead to pursue the Bush administration's appeal of the federal court decision striking down the so-called "decency and respect" law governing NEA grants that was passed by Congress in 1990. The federal court had found that the law—requiring the NEA to take into consideration "general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public"—was unconstitutionally vague and restricted artistic freedom just as surely as a similar standard applied to a public university would restrict academic freedom.

Whether or not one appreciates the work of Karen Finley or other performance artists, it should be evident that constraining the NEA process with considerations as vague and ideologically loaded as "decency" and "respect" is not likely to produce the kind of principled judgments about artistic merit that the NEA was created to make.

Marjorie Heins
Director and Staff Counsel
Arts Censorship Project
American Civil Liberties Union Foundation
New York, N.Y.

The Editors reply:
We appreciate Miss Heins's concern: of the $252,000 the courts awarded to Karen Finley and three other artists, $202,000 went to the ACLU for legal fees.

Wilson's "The Sixties"

To the Editors:
Jeffrey Meyers is by all means entitled to his views on Lewis M. Dabney's editing of Edmund Wilson's *The Sixties*, as expressed in his review of the book in your September issue. However, your readers have the right to know that Mr. Meyers has recently begun a biography of Wilson to compete with the official biography currently being written by Mr. Dabney. This fact certainly sheds light on Mr. Meyers's vitriol and the reasons behind it.

Roger W. Straus
President
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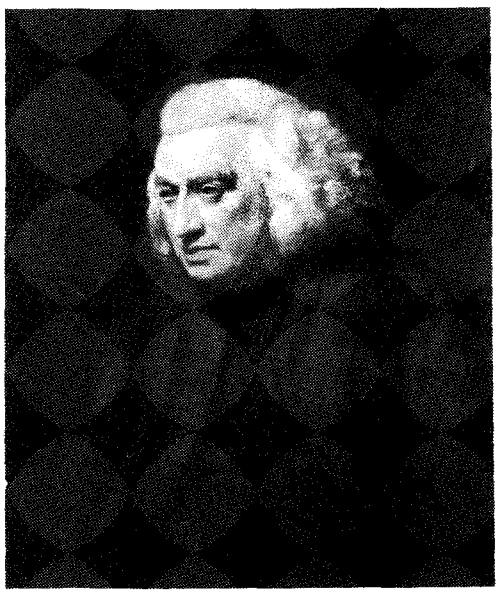

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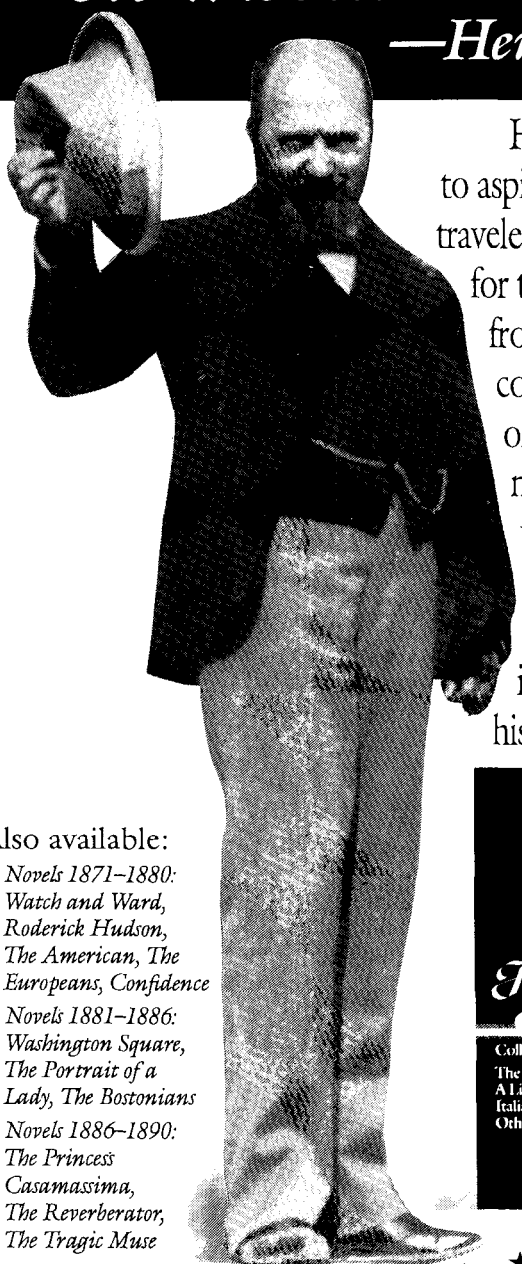

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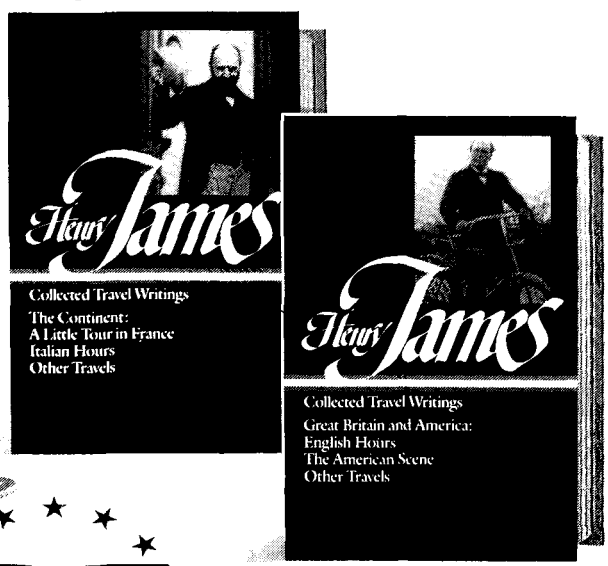

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